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"The Boys Want You Out!"

An interview with original Beatles drummer

Pete Best

From the early days of the Beatles to his dismissal from the band

THE BEATLES

CREEDENCE

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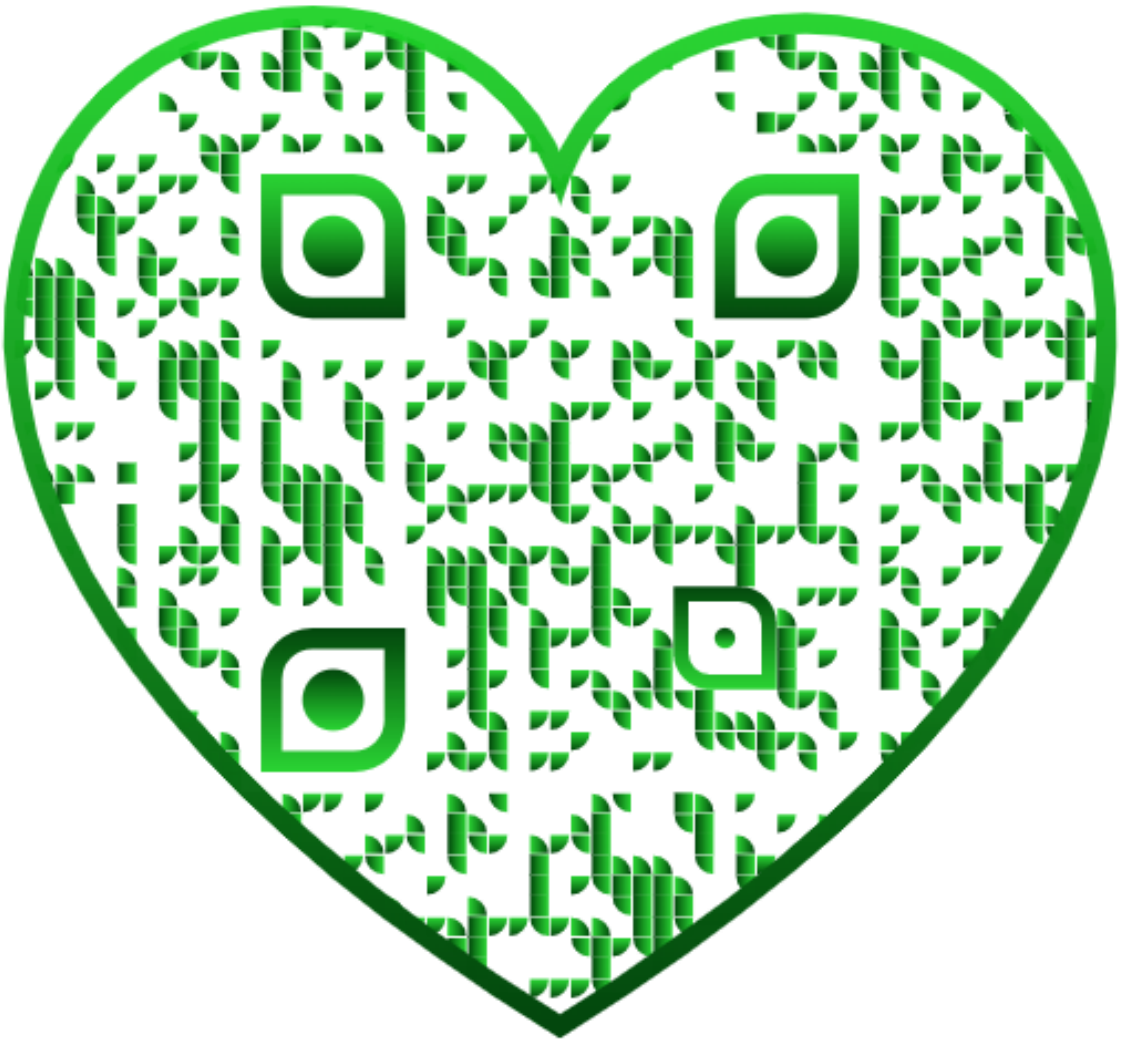

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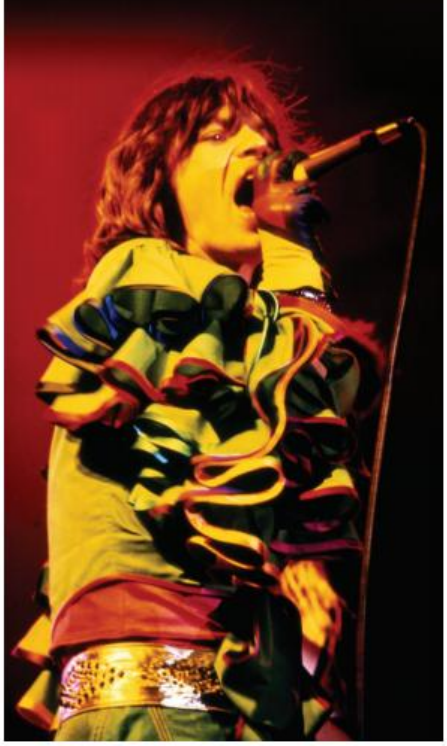

Editor's Welcome

Welcome to Music Legends the interactive magazine for music lovers. Music Legends brings the magic of the digital age to the world of music magazines.

Just as the title suggests, Music Legends showcases a great range of articles featuring new insights into the biggest names in the history of rock music. Sure, the music is powerful, but so too are the tales of the darker underside of fame and fortune; the booze, the fights, artistic differences, the drugs, the splits, the lawsuits, the politics and so much more. With Music Legends there is a whole new digital dimension for you to enjoy. Today, the modern reader is no longer limited to simply what can be conveyed on the printed page, so check out what treats are on offer inside this issue below.

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Music Legends is proud to present this exciting reader promotion – in conjunction with Coda Records we are offering a free covermount CD to celebrate our cover stars – the Beatles.

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Keep your eyes peeled for exclusive free CDs on forthcoming issues, and if you love this month's offering then why not send us a snap or a short review to be featured in the next issue.

Thank you for reading Music Legends! We all hope you love the magazine and decide to join us again in future.

H. Carruthers

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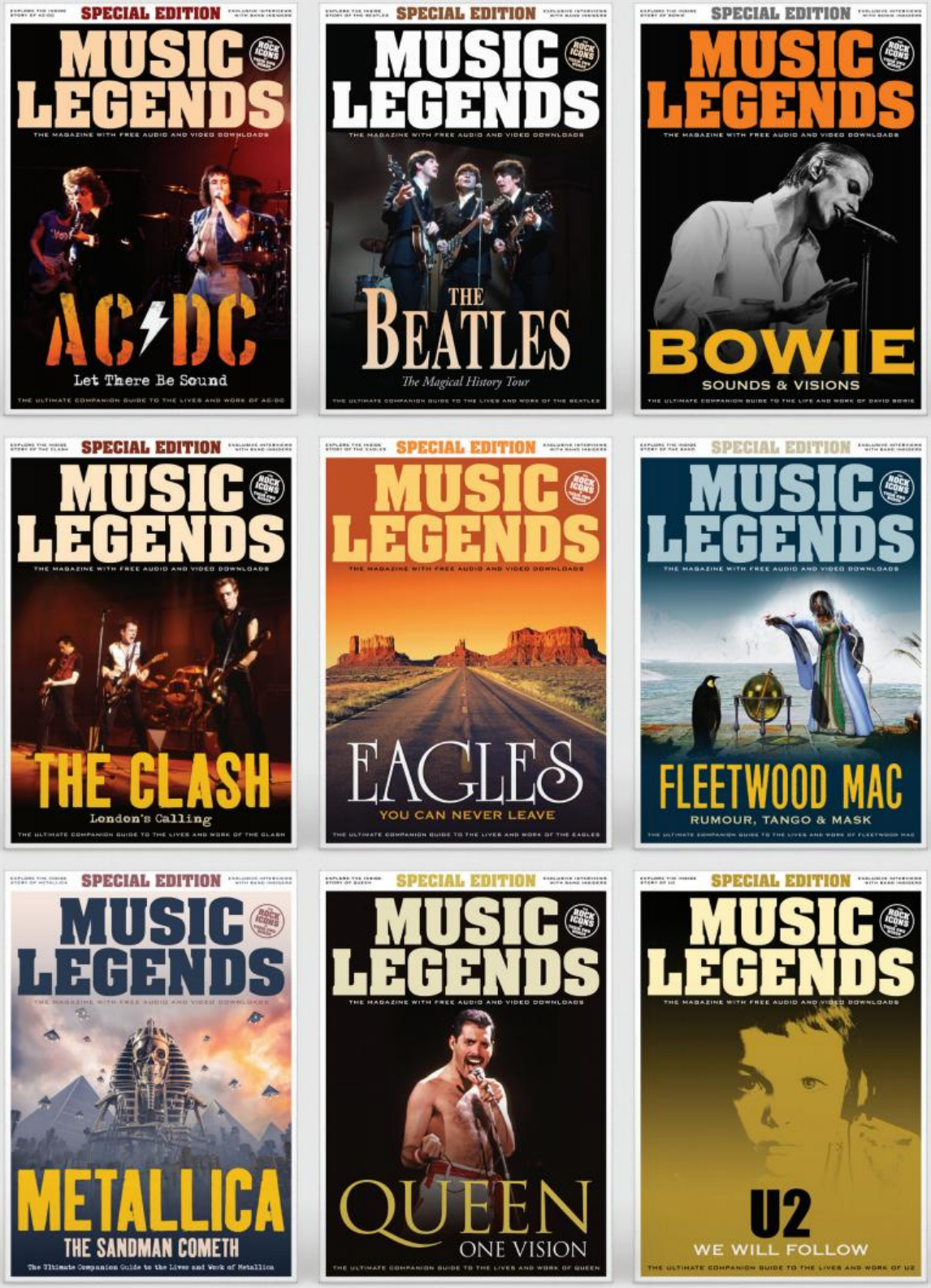

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"The Boys Want You Out!"

An Interview with Pete Best

It must be an extraordinary thing to have your life defined by a single unexpected event, by something climactic that happens to you and alters your life completely, or that determines how people will always remember you. One of these extraordinary events occurred in August 1962, when Pete Best was fired from the Beatles just as the band was on the cusp of superstardom.

Pete Best was summoned to the NEMS offices to be told by a highly flustered Brian Epstein that the rest of the Beatles had decided they wanted him out of the group and Ringo Starr brought in to replace him on drums. Best maintains to this day that he had no inkling of what they were planning and that the sacking came like a bolt out of the blue; he'd gone to Epstein's office that morning expecting to discuss upcoming Beatles engagements and gigs.

As if suddenly finding he longer had a job was not enough, the timing for Pete Best could hardly have been worse. By common consent, the Beatles were about to hit the big time. Only a few days after the sacking, Granada Television's cameras were at the Cavern to record a Beatles show there, having been alerted to their incredible popularity in the English North West. The group was also due to make their debut record, which would see them take the first steps on the road to worldwide fame. Pete Best had to watch it all happen knowing that he could – and perhaps should – have been part of the whole Beatles phenomenon.

What must really have gnawed away at him was that he never got a proper explanation for his sacking. The entire episode is now part of rock folklore, and Pete Best has had to live with it all his life; a day can't go by without him being reminded of it.

When the Beatles were planning their definitive Anthology project in the mid-nineties, rumours were about that they'd take the opportunity to put the whole thing to rest. They didn't, of course. George Harrison made vague references to Best's supposed unreliability, saying, 'Historically, it might have looked like we did something nasty to Pete,' and suggested that, anyway, Ringo joining the group was somehow simply meant to be.

Although he had to wait thirty-odd years, Best did finally get some reward for his time with the Beatles. They used some of his Hamburg, Decca, and Parlophone performances on the Anthology CDs and his share of the well-deserved royalties was reported to have been substantial.

Pete, when did music first come into your life?

Like a lot of teenagers in Liverpool, it was when rock 'n' roll and the folk scene, or skiffle, or whatever it was started playing on the radio. I was captivated by the music, the sounds that were coming out. But I suppose my real love affair with music began when my mother opened the Casbah Club in 1959. Liverpool was always a hotbed for music though, even before the fifties. In the forties, many of the big bands came from Liverpool.

I'd seen it on the television and watched it on stage, but when the Casbah opened in 1959, I could actually see bands performing down there and rubbed shoulders with some of them. It was very much the case of always being influenced by Gene Krupa on the drumming side, because people turn round and said, 'You know, you have natural rhythm, you love music, you love dancing, you like going out, et cetera, et cetera.'

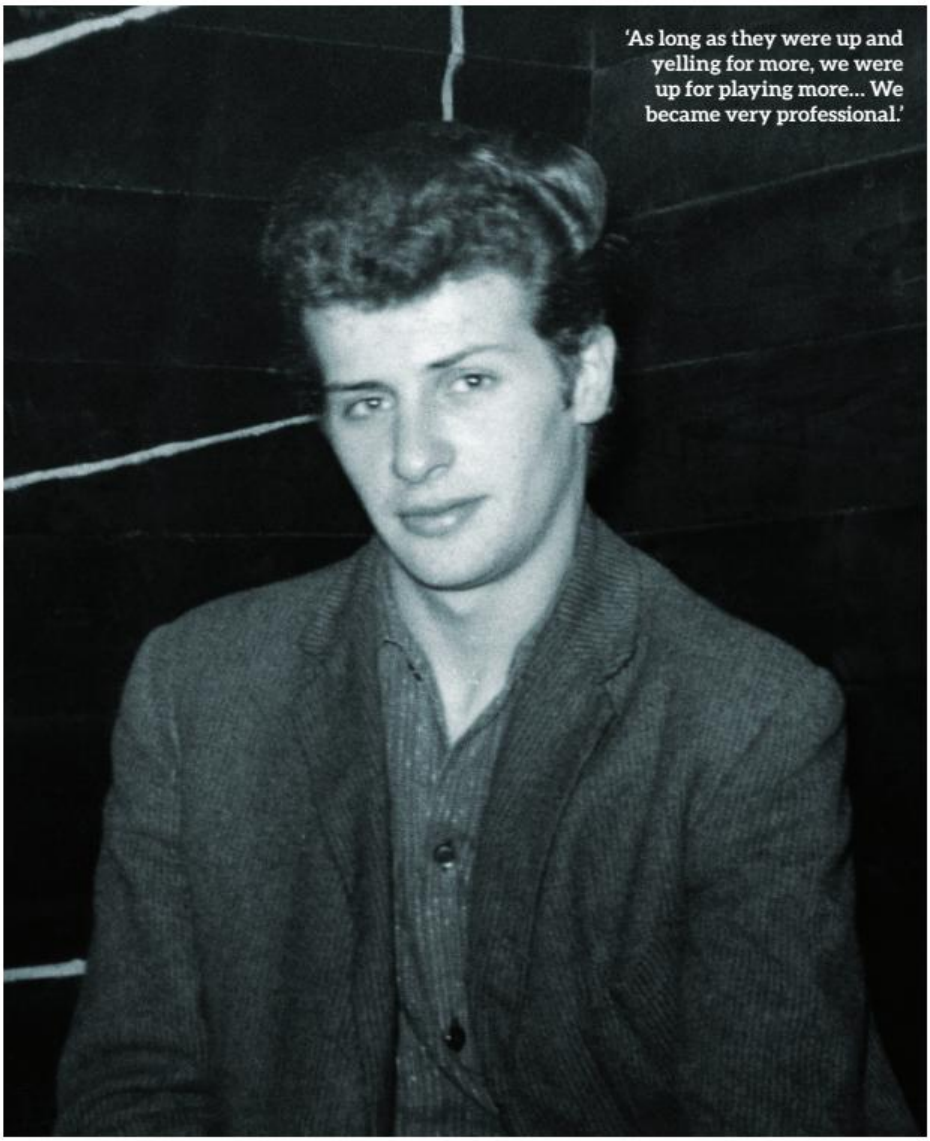
Like most kids in Liverpool, I started off on a guitar, but I wasn't comfy with it. It was just the usual three chords and it was like, 'Nah, I'm not getting the hang of this.'

But drumming – that was different. I was told I had natural rhythm, so I was banging pots, tables, just this, that, and the other, and I thought, 'Right – this is my thing.' So, by watching old movies with Gene Krupa in and actually seeing drums getting played in the cellar [of the Cavern Club] by different bands from Liverpool, I became captivated by them.

When the opportunity came to actually form a band, it was like, 'I want to be the drummer', or they would say, 'You are going to be the drummer,' and that's how I became involved. I started off with a little band called the Black Jacks, which played the Casbah and the local scene. Then, of course, the rest is history in a way – the Beatles, Lee Curtis, The Pete Best Band – everything in its sequence.

What your mum (Mona Best) was doing in Liverpool was pretty unusual, wasn't it?

It was. Coffee bars were in vogue in those days, she got the idea from the Two I's in London. Of course, Allan Williams had the Jacaranda in Liverpool, along with a few other places, but what she wanted was not just another coffee bar; she wanted a coffee club. It was slightly different. Her idea was she wanted to bring music to the kids, which wasn't happening in coffee bars in Liverpool. That's where The Quarrymen really began, you know:



'As long as they were up and yelling for more, we were up for playing more... We became very professional.'

John, George, Paul and Ken Brown. It was how I got involved with them.

The Casbah was going to be somewhere with the right décor, where young people could meet in a friendly environment and enjoy themselves. It was a very family-orientated atmosphere where adults could come as well if they wanted, but predominantly it was kids that came initially, until the word got out.

But she wanted it to be different; she wanted it to be a safe haven. She wanted kids off the streets, somewhere they could come and be themselves. And the décor was very different, with her eastern influences. There was the Aztec ceiling and the famous Casbah dragon on the wall. You know, very different things, like walls being clad in timber, which was unheard-of in those days. She had great ideas for the floor and the lights and when word got out, we had a membership of something like three hundred before the club even opened.

Opening night, 29 August 1959, was absolutely incredible. There were queues down the path. We were due to open at half-past seven. We delayed the band going on stage because people were still waiting to get in. We had to sign them up. Instead of just signing at the back door, we were signing them in the kitchen, everywhere we could take the membership money. It was a fantastic night with an unforgettable atmosphere.

The kids absolutely loved it, but I could tell then, already, after that opening night, that my mother had other ideas for the club. Opening night had been a huge success, but she developed it and built it – from bands playing one night a week to playing over the weekend, from there, to playing seven nights week. It never closed, and just about every household name on the Liverpool music scene played there.

The beauty of it was that she gave an opportunity to young bands as well, you know; she auditioned bands. She knew a good band when she saw one. It was, like, if you go down well at the Casbah you get another gig. If you don't, go away and rehearse and come back again and maybe we'll try you out again.

The Beatles performing at the Top Ten Club in Hamburg, Germany, in April 1961.
From left to right: Paul McCartney (piano), Pete Best, Stuart Sutcliffe, George Harrison and John Lennon.

Bands just loved it. They loved that philosophy. You know, she was getting them from all over town; one night you could see the Beatles, the next night the Searchers or Gerry (Marsden). I could go on and on and on. Another night it might be an audition band. But they all got treated the same by Mo, and within a short period of time she turned this little humble coffee club into what became the catalyst for the Merseybeat sound.

That's what we have said. Long before the Cavern, which was a jazz cellar, the Casbah was thriving as a rock 'n' roll club. I think that's what we must emphasise when we are talking to people about the early music scene in Liverpool.

And that's the place where you and the Beatles cut your teeth?

Yeah, and got a few pulled as well. I actually got to know them as The Quarrymen, because the band that should have opened the Casbah broke up a couple of weeks beforehand, and Ken Brown and George Harrison came down and saw my mother Mona and said, 'Mo, we've got bad news for you. The band has broken up.'

Of course, it was like, 'God, we've only got a couple of weeks to opening night! What are we going to do?' George turned round and said he happened to know a couple of guys who weren't doing anything, and maybe they'd be interested, because it was going to be a residency, and residencies for a young band was like striking gold in those days.

So, my mother, in her infinite wisdom, asked George to bring them down the next day. So lo and behold, who showed up but John Lennon and Paul McCartney? She put the deal to them – it was a residency, and they would be playing for the princely sum of £3, which was like, wow, 15 shillings each! A lot of money in 1959.

> "I was knocked out by John the first time I saw him. I just loved the way he looked – his image, the way he handled himself, the little quips he made."

They said, 'We would love to play here,' and the deal was done then. Then she said, 'Hang on a minute, what are you going to call yourselves? John said well, we used to be called The Quarrymen, so that's what we'll call ourselves. It was that line-up that opened the club: John, George, Paul and Ken Brown. They didn't have a drummer.

What were your impressions of them in those very early days?

I was fortunate I think, because I got to know them on a social level before I actually joined the band in 1960. I think the more you mixed with them, the more you came to appreciate and understand their humour. I was knocked out by John the first time I saw him. I just loved the way he looked – his image, the way he handled himself, the little quips he made. You know, he had that quirky sense of humour. Sometimes I was doubled up in stitches before he'd even come into the club.

Paul was very much the PR guy, you know – the businessman. He was very prim and proper: 'What's the deal, Mona?' – that type of thing.

George was the youngest guy in the band, so he was kind of the junior member, but when he got into their company he became just like them. I just found they were dead easy to get on with. Of course, with them playing here, socialising here, mixing upstairs in the kitchen, coming to the famous Casbah

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John Lennon photographed by Astrid Kirchherr in Hamburg in 1960. Stuart Sutcliffe is the figure in the background.

parties that used to take place upstairs, I got to know them very well.

Of course, when I actually auditioned for them, the offer came to go to Germany in 1960. It wasn't like an audition for a new band; it was like auditioning for a gang of mates. We were all playing the same music, we had all done the same thing, and we had all played the same clubs. It was just the fact that they were one of the first bands that went out to Germany and they asked me, and that's how joined them.

Tell me what you thought of Stuart (Sutcliffe, the fifth member of the Beatles when they played in Hamburg).
The first time I met Stu was in the Casbah. He was very arty. I'd say that John, the first time I met him, was most probably the one with the arty sideburns and the rolled collar and all the rest, but when I saw Stu, he was more artistic-looking than even John was. He had that image. I think the first time I saw him what struck me was that he had an uncanny resemblance to James Dean. You know, the way he swept his hair back, the way he wore his sunglasses – in the middle of the club he would sit there with his sunglasses on, and that was the bohemian look in those days. That was an art student.

He was very quiet until you got to know him, and then you saw that, yeah, deep down he wanted to become a musician. He was a brilliant artist. The world knows that today; that goes without saying, but he was coerced into becoming a member of the Beatles. He had his arm twisted, and that happened in the Casbah. He'd had a painting on show at the John Moore's exhibition, and that had earned him fifty or sixty quid. Of course, they needed a bass player, and guess what – he was the guy! The only drawback was he couldn't play, but they said buy a bass and you can join the band and we'll show you how.

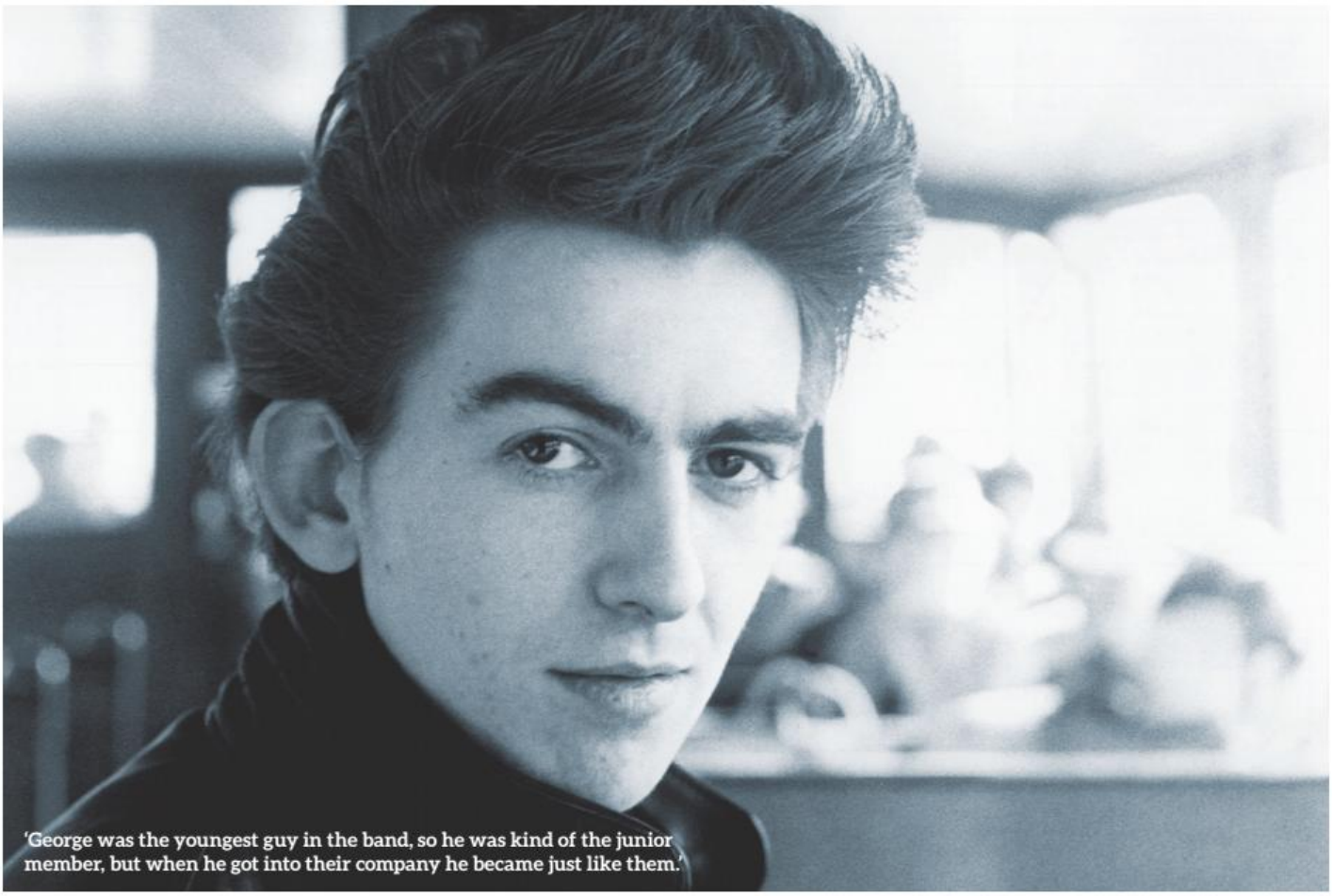
Then, of course, after that we were on our way to Hamburg, and it was very much everyone living in everyone's pocket. We were in one another's company twenty-four hours a day.

Hamburg – what an amazing adventure for five young men…
It was. Even though none of us admitted it, I think we all had a parental chat before we got on the bus – the usual things! I can imagine each parent saying the same thing. You know, you are going to Hamburg, enjoy it but be careful – you know how it is.

But we didn't know. We knew we were going to a place called Hamburg, and that's about all we knew. We were excited about the fact that we were most probably only the second band from Liverpool to go. Derry and the Seniors were the first ones out there. Allan Williams was responsible for it, for taking us out, and as he always said, he smuggled us into Hamburg the first time. We didn't know we had to have papers and work permits and all that type of thing. It was just, 'You're students. Leave it up to me and we'll get you in there.'

But there was great excitement in the van certainly, because we just didn't know what to expect. We knew Hamburg was a port, like Liverpool was a port, but when we actually got there and hit the Reeperbahn – that was absolutely incredible. You have to remember we were just, what, seventeen or eighteen years old. We hit these amazing neon lights, which just sort of lit the whole thing up, a mile and a half, or whatever it is. It made Blackpool Illuminations look like a little fairy town.

And it was absolutely heaving. The crowd was out, the atmosphere was out, and of course we suddenly realised that this was St Pauli. This was the red-light district, and the more we got to know it, when we found out where we were playing and the hours we had to play it became like a second home to us. St



'George was the youngest guy in the band, so he was kind of the junior member, but when he got into their company he became just like them.'

Pauli, even though it was one of the most famous red-light districts in the world, it was our playground, and that's what we loved about the place. It was great.

But a very tough work schedule…

It was very hard. We thought we were going to be playing in the Kaiserkeller, and of course we weren't. We were playing in the grotty old Indra down at the bottom end of the Grosse Freiheit, which was off the Reeperbahn. The challenge was for us to turn this little club into a second Kaiserkeller, which we eventually did.

We were told we'd be playing seven hours a night, with fifteen minutes off every hour. It was a hell of a challenge, because no one from Liverpool had played those hours before. It was like, okay, that sounds tough – how do we do it? Right, so we built ourselves up. We adjusted to it. As the crowds built up, there would be certain periods in the sets when we wouldn't have to be so frantic and energetic as we were when it was a full house, so we would pace ourselves. We would add solos into numbers to make them last longer.

So on a hot night, when the crowds were packed in, you might get a version of *What'd I Say* which would last about fifteen minutes, but the crowds loved it. As long as they were up and yelling for more, we were up for playing more. If the crowd emptied a little bit, we'd take it down a step. We became very professional. We grew up at the Indra.

And at this stage the material was all cover versions? Was there any songwriting being done?

Not at that stage. Not on the first trip out. I mean I was aware of the fact that they had written songs when they were fifteen and sixteen, but I hadn't heard any of them. What we were doing at that time was all covers. Most of the bands in Liverpool were doing covers of Little Richard, Chuck Berry, the Everley Brothers. We were fortunate because of the singers we had in the band; they were very good harmony-wise. Each singer had their own speciality. John was Chuck Berry and Gene Vincent, Paul was Little Richard and Ray Charles, George was Carl Perkins and Eddie Cochran. So they were the sounds we were playing. That's what we cut our teeth on.

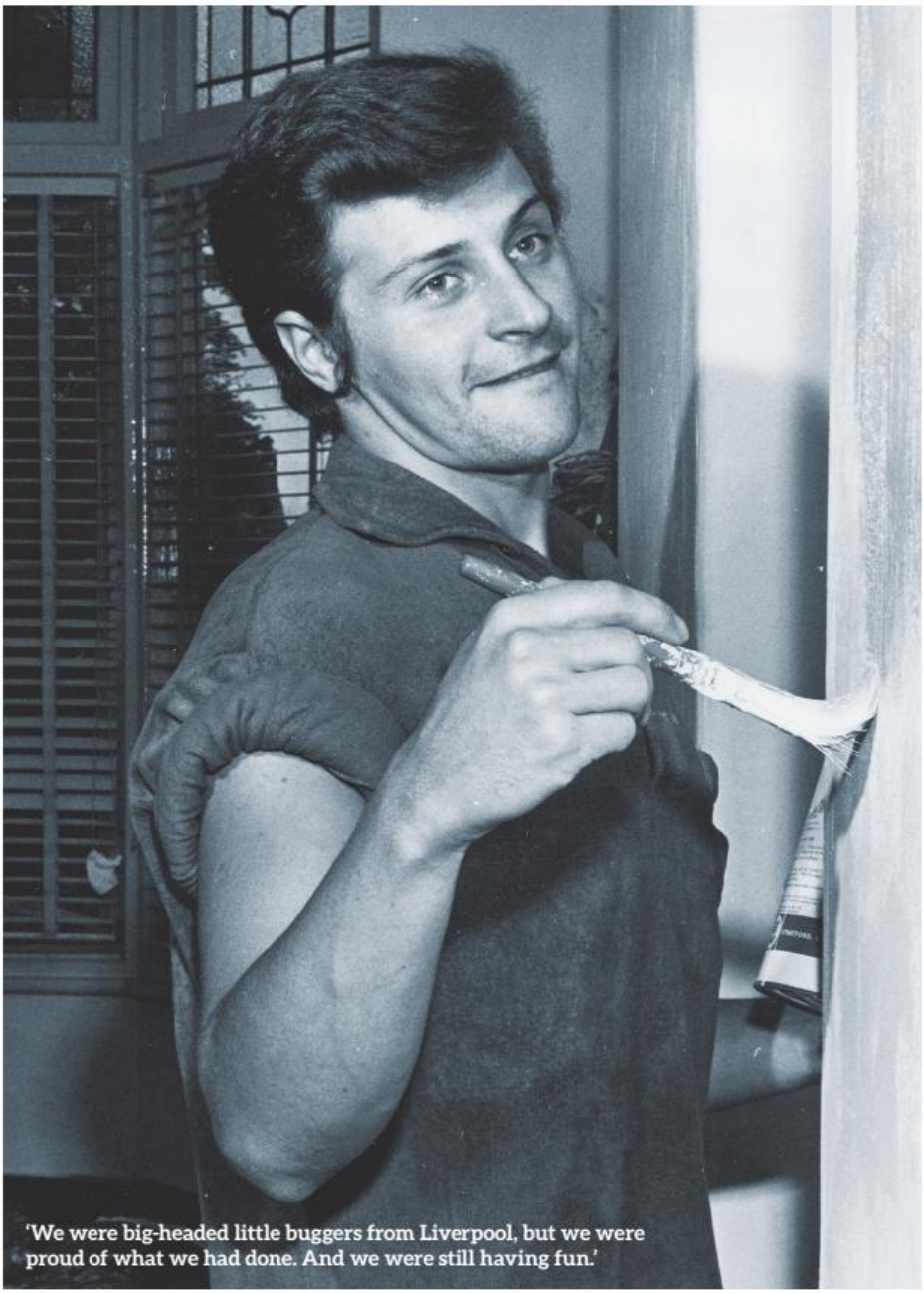
I think when we started to establish ourselves in Liverpool, and on the second trip back to Germany, that's when we started to experiment a little bit. We thought, 'Okay, let's throw in a couple of songs that we've written ourselves.'

When we came back to Liverpool, we were one hell of a band. The image, the type of music we were playing, the style of it, the savageness of it, the power of it – it just blew people away. Audiences had never seen anything like it before, but here we were, five lads from Liverpool, delivering it right to your doorstep!

A lot of bands in Liverpool changed overnight as a result of seeing us. You know, they had been very lightweight before that, a little bit like Cliff Richard and the Shadows, dressed in sparkly suits, very clean-cut. All of a sudden – leather jackets everywhere! Everyone had a leather jacket and there was a kind of muse all over Liverpool. Their images changed; the type of material they were playing became very heavy and frenetic. It was what the Merseybeat sound is remembered for today – what it's recognised for.

To be one step ahead of them all, that was the goal. They may have been writing songs, but they didn't have the courage to perform them on stage. That was our big thing, and it was something else that set us apart – when you could say from the stage, 'Here's a song which we've written ourselves,' and then play it.

At first, you could feel there was an atmosphere in the audience – 'Hang on a minute, what's this going to be like?'



'We were big-headed little buggers from Liverpool, but we were proud of what we had done. And we were still having fun.'

Fortunately, we had great songwriters – Lennon and McCartney – so even their early stuff, of course it's world famous now, songs like *Love of the Loved*, they went down fantastically well with the audience. They loved them. Of course, then it was, 'The Beatles are writing their own material,' and everyone started writing in Liverpool.

It must have given you a hell of a kick, doing your own stuff…

Well, the songs were more personal, and the lads used to play it up, don't get me wrong. They loved introducing one of the songs that they had written. Paul introducing *Like Dreamers Do*, for example. It was a great number, and it was it was one of the originals that we did at the Decca audition. We liked it that much. It went down that well with the crowds and there always used to be a glint in Macca's eye when he did it. When he announced it he would pick out a girl in the audience, and of course they would all be in the front row, and it was like, bang, 'Oooh – Paul's talking to me.'

It was a part of being professional and adding another dimension to the band, which other bands couldn't do.

So, you felt much more confident during the second trip to Hamburg?

We'd conquered Hamburg as far as we were concerned. We had done our four months there, which should only have been a month. We were kicked out on our way back. We came back a new band.

But in my opinion, Beatlemania really started at the Casbah when we got back, regardless of what other people say. Some reckon that it was that show at the Litherland Town Hall, on 27 December 1962. It wasn't. The first gig we did in Liverpool when we returned from the second trip to Hamburg was at the Casbah.

That particular night, the first night the Beatles played here after Hamburg, the reaction from the Liverpool audiences was – well, you couldn't move in here. Health and Safety? Didn't exist! The word went out on the street and it was like, we've got to go and see the Beatles. We took Liverpool by storm.

We'd been virtually unknown before we went out to Germany, but when we came back we delivered this powerhouse show that had every promoter in Liverpool screaming out for us. When we went back to Hamburg the second time, it was to a different club. It was the Top Ten club, which was the best club in town at that time. The audiences were a little more upbeat, even though the crowd from the Kaiserkeller still came, because that's was the only place they could see the Beatles. So Peter Eckhorn, who owned the Top Ten, was rubbing his hands because the Kaiserkeller was his rival round the corner and it was having a hard time. He had Tony Sheridan, who was the house musician; he had the Beatles, and they were the two biggest names in Hamburg, and he had them under one roof, playing on the same stage. His club was packed every night and we were riding high. We were big-headed little buggers from Liverpool, but we were proud of what we had done. And we were still having fun.

Do you feel you needed to go back to Hamburg the second time?

I think we needed to go back, and anyway, we'd promised Peter Eckhorn that we would go back and play there. It was all dance halls in Liverpool, and we felt that the opportunity we had in Hamburg, playing in a club as a residential band, was something which wasn't going to happen in Liverpool. And we were playing great. We were playing seven nights a week. A lot of other bands were playing only once or twice a week.

But going back there and playing under one roof and being in the public eye all the time was fantastic, and Hamburg was fast becoming a music city as well. A lot of music-industry people in Hamburg were starting to take an interest in what we would call English music, or English artists that were appearing over there, too. So, it was great to go back to and it was during that second trip that Bert Kaempfert signed us up, which marvellous for us.

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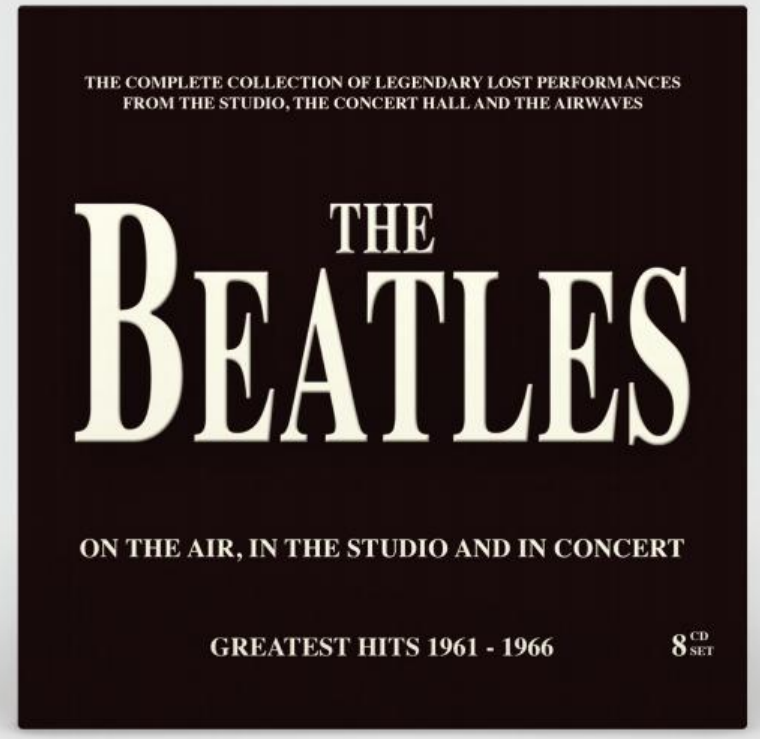

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How did that come about?
We'd been playing at the Top Ten for about three months, and round about the middle of May we were told by Peter Eckhorn that Bert, who was the biggest record manager in Germany at that time – a big cheese at Polydor records, was interested. People had seen the band, given him some feedback, and he was interested in seeing it all for himself. He came down and watched us a couple of times, and we always got the tip-off from the manager of the club when he was in the audience, 'Boys, Bert Kaempfert is in tonight!'

And away we would go. We'd do some of the choice numbers to impress, you know. But he was impressed with the band, anyway; he particularly liked the harmonies. He liked Sheridan, too, the combination of the two together, and the fact that he could record Tony by himself and the Beatles by themselves. So, one particular night when we'd finished playing he called us over and said he'd love to record us and sign us up. We set a date. We were going to record in Germany for the Polydor label and that date was set for sometime in June, just before we left. Over those two days we recorded *My Bonnie* and *Cry for a Shadow* and *Ain't She Sweet*, which are all famous songs now in the Beatles story.

Didn't you have to change your names slightly, to the Beat Boys? What was that all about?
Well, I think that was some good old German business nous by Bert. He realised that the Beatles weren't going to be around in Hamburg indefinitely, and he wanted a band that could include any members, not necessarily the ones on the record, if it did well. The Beat Boys – well, it could be anyone, couldn't it? But there's only one group called the Beatles.

It caused a bit of confusion when the records were released years afterwards, but it got sorted eventually and people came to realise which were Beatles tracks and which weren't.

There was also another reason, which was quite humorous, actually. Another tale in the Beat Brothers saga! In Hamburg, in the St Pauli area, there was lot of German slang spoken. Not surprising, really. Well, there was a word in the German slang vocabulary at that time, I don't think it exists any more now, but it was for the male appendage, and it was called the peadle. Old Bert got a bit concerned. The Beatles, the peadles – a bit close for comfort. So, that was another reason why he said, 'Guys it's got to be the Beat Brothers until the record company sorts it out.'

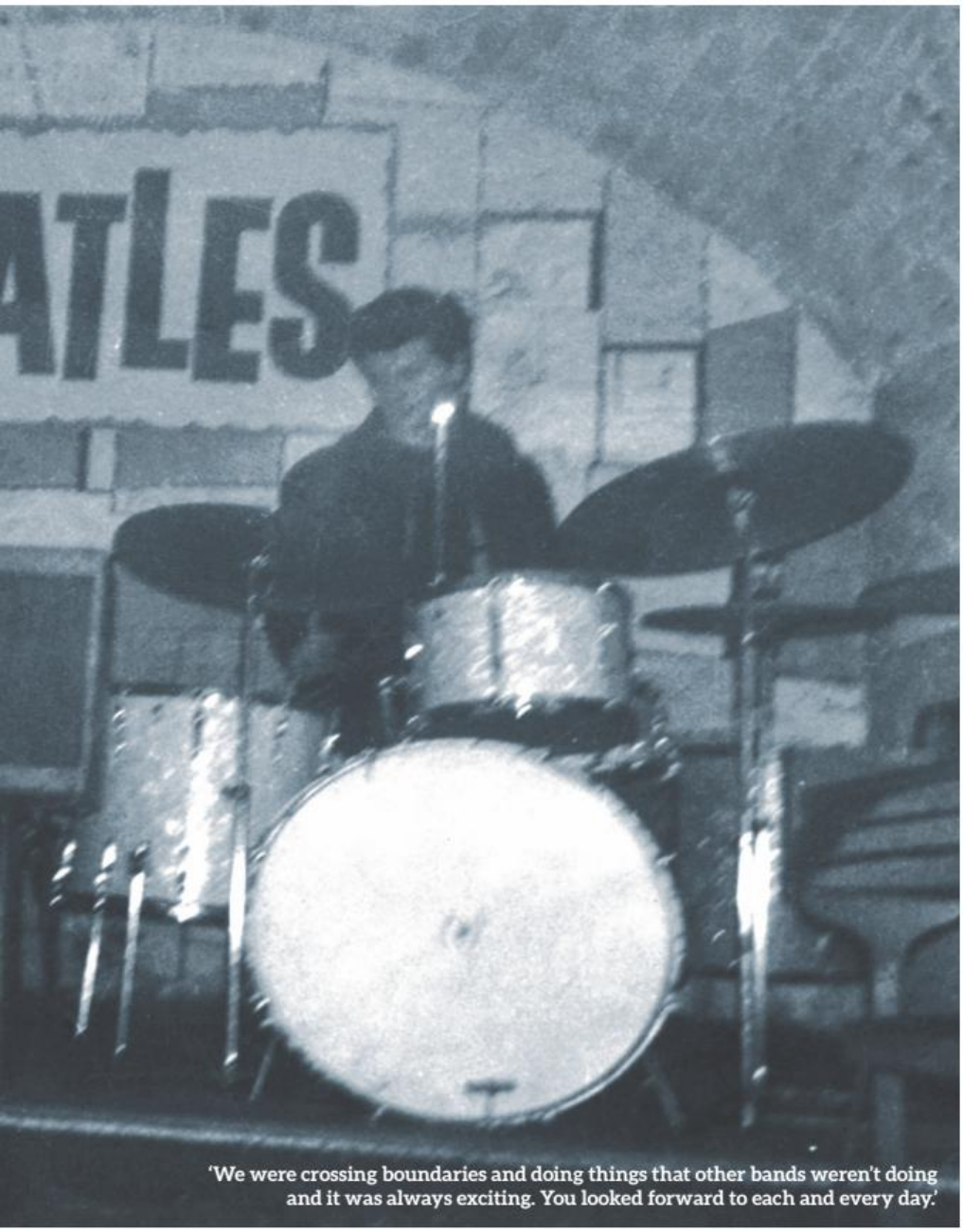
The Beatles at the Cavern Club in Liverpool, on 5 April 1962. From left to right: John Lennon, Paul McCartney, and Pete Best.

How did you wind down between shows?
Like any mad musician would do, I guess! We were all fond of having a drink. Women were abundant and we were healthy young lads. We enjoyed ourselves. It was a case of having to. I think about it sometimes now, and we were doing things that by today's standards might be pretty tame, but to us in those days – drinking and orgies, this was rock and roll, man!

We were in the middle of Hamburg, in the red-light district, with women fawning over us left, right, and centre from every walk of life. You know, from high-class prostitutes down to homely girls on the street. So we enjoyed ourselves, shall we say?

We worked long hours we had to let off steam. We did what we felt was right and there was nothing malicious about it. I'm certain it still goes on today, you know. You ask any musician travelling the world, but in those days it was, you know, things you couldn't do in Liverpool you could do in Hamburg. So we did them. And we enjoyed doing them.

What was the reception like in Liverpool when you returned after the second trip?
We were Polydor recording artists! That was the big word on the street because we were one of the first bands to be signed up. It didn't matter that it was a German label; it was the biggest German label. Of course, it was great for the posters and the publicity and everything else. The crowds were great. They wanted us back. We had been away three months, and their



'We were crossing boundaries and doing things that other bands weren't doing and it was always exciting. You looked forward to each and every day.'

favourite band, or one of their favourite bands, was coming back home again. We were going to be playing the local scenes. We were going to play the Casbah, the Cavern, you know, all the local haunts. We were back in town again. Kids in Liverpool could see us and not just hear about us. The fact that we came back as recording artists made things all the more exciting.

How did life as a Beatle change when Brian Epstein managed you?

He changed certain things we did, and at first we weren't happy with it, to be honest, but I think of it like this: he'd got a rough diamond. He'd got this priceless twenty-four-carat diamond there, and he had to polish it. He'd say, 'I like the way you are on stage, but I'd like you to be more professional,' and he started to groom us. That's the word – groom.

We'd been drinking and smoking on stage, for example. Well, it was, like, that's out. We had performed shows sometimes where we didn't have a set list; we would just fire off one after the other. What number are you doing next, oh so and so, that's fine. The crowd loved it. They're happy, we're happy. Brian wasn't, though. He introduced set lists. Strict times that we had to be at venues before a show – not rolling up five minutes before and with a pie in your hand.

And, of course, the big thing was he had us put into suits. We had lived in leathers for two years, so John and I were very unhappy about it, going into suits. We compromised, you know, certain venues we wore suits and other venues we wore the leathers. Until, eventually, Beatle suits and Beatle hairstyles all became very fashionable. But that was what Brian did. He began to groom us for the next step.

And the next big step was a record deal here in Britain…

What we wanted was an English recording contract. That was the important thing. We had this recording contract in Germany, but because of the sheer economics of it having to go over there to record, we felt, now hang on a minute – we need a record company in England: Decca, EMI, or someone.

Decca was the biggest, so lets try and get a deal with them, and that was the mission we gave Brian. He went to them because of his contacts in the record industry. He went to the biggest record company going at the time, Decca, and bent the ear of Mike Smith, dear old Mike, to come down and watch the Beatles at the Cavern. He was absolutely knocked out with us. Hence, you know, the famous, or infamous, Decca auditions of 1962. That was the speed Brian was moving. Remember, he'd only been our manager for a couple of months. So, to land an audition within a couple of months with the biggest record company in England, as well as grooming us and polishing us – it's not as if we could say he wasn't doing anything! He was, you know – he was flying.

What were the Decca recording sessions like?

This was an audition and it was a very important audition, and Brian went to great lengths to tell us about before we went down there that we must be in bed early. Of course, half past two in the morning, we are in the middle of Trafalgar Square, doing certain things that we shouldn't be doing. Got to the session hung over. It was New Years Day. The excitement was certainly there.

We played about fourteen or fifteen numbers. Not our choice, but Brian's, and if there's one thing Brian got wrong, I'd say it was the material that he made us play on that particular day. It didn't do us any justice. I could see the thinking in that he wanted to show Decca the cross-section of material, from out and out rock, to great harmonies, to country and western, to the original songs, but, as Mike Smith said, what he saw in the Cavern didn't come over in the studio. That was one of the reasons why we never got the gig with Decca.

How did you feel after being turned down by Decca?

I think we felt desperate more than anything else. We thought that we had Decca's contract in the bag. The final

Pete Best on Beatles manager Brian Epstein: 'He changed certain things we did, and at first we weren't happy with it, to be honest, but I think of it like this: he'd got a rough diamond.'

words from Mike Smith as we left were, 'Don't worry, lads'. We even went out and celebrated. St Johns Wood, big lavish dinner, on Brian of course. The wine was flowing, and we all came back in high spirits. Then, a couple of weeks afterwards, we were told that Decca had turned us down. I think they signed Brian Poole and the Tremeloes instead. So, that was like a red rag to a bull to us. We said, 'Okay, Brian, get back on your bike again. Get us a contract!'

As we know, Decca had been the biggest company, but he took the tapes from Decca and he hawked them round London, all the record companies, and he wasn't getting anywhere. They weren't biting, until someone heard them and, to cut a long story short because it is well chronicled, got them to George Martin, and as a result we got a test recording date, which was set for 6 June 1962, just after we had come back from Hamburg for the third time. We opened the Star Club, and because Bert released us from our Polydor contract and we could now say we were EMI recording stars, which was a big company in England. By now, Brian had got us onto the BBC radio – Teenagers Turn at the Manchester Playhouse – and we were broadcasting stars as well.

When we recorded, we were adamant about the fact that we wanted to record our own material. *Love Me Do* and *P.S. I Love You*, for example. We'd tried them out on the German crowds at the Star Club. We changed the arrangements several times, until we were quite happy with them. Even though George Martin wanted us to record other people's material, we were adamant. We write our own material and we want to record it. We were quite dogmatic about it, actually. If it was anyone else's material we wouldn't pay too much attention to it. We would do a backhanded version of it to make sure that our material was stronger. Hence, *Love Me Do* and *P.S. I Love You*, they were the first ones we wanted to record.

How did the recording session go?

There were problems, actually. I mean, okay, we were a little bit blasé, I'll be quite honest. When you look back, we were the Beatles and we thought we were the biggest thing since sliced bread, even though we weren't, but we're from Liverpool and we had that Liverpool arrogance.

When we got to EMI at Abbey Road, we went into Studio Two and we just set up like we normally do, a couple of sound boards up and all the other bits and pieces. The sound engineers were miles away at the bottom end of the studio. We played around with the sound for a while. I suppose our equipment, our amplifiers, weren't as good as they could have been, so there were a few problems with amplification, but we played the numbers and we were quite happy with the way they had gone. At the end of the day, it wasn't supposed to be a final cut. This was just to let people know because they hadn't heard us before, but as we know now, after that particular session words were spoken. My drumming wasn't good enough, or alleged to be not good enough. They wanted to use a session drummer, and a short while after that I got the order of the golden boot.

So what happened next?

George Martin or someone said that they weren't happy with the sound they were getting with my drumming, and that it needed to be played around with a little bit more. Looking at it from a purely economic angle, they thought that they should bring in a session drummer, who was Andy White, and get the session over and done with.

What they were saying is that what happens outside of the studio is nothing to do with us. There's no need to change the format or the line-up. In fact, we got back in touch with George Martin after the dismissal, just to try to resolve this puzzle, because we weren't getting any answers. There was all these adverse things being said, but Brian wouldn't give me a definitive reason. He was quite

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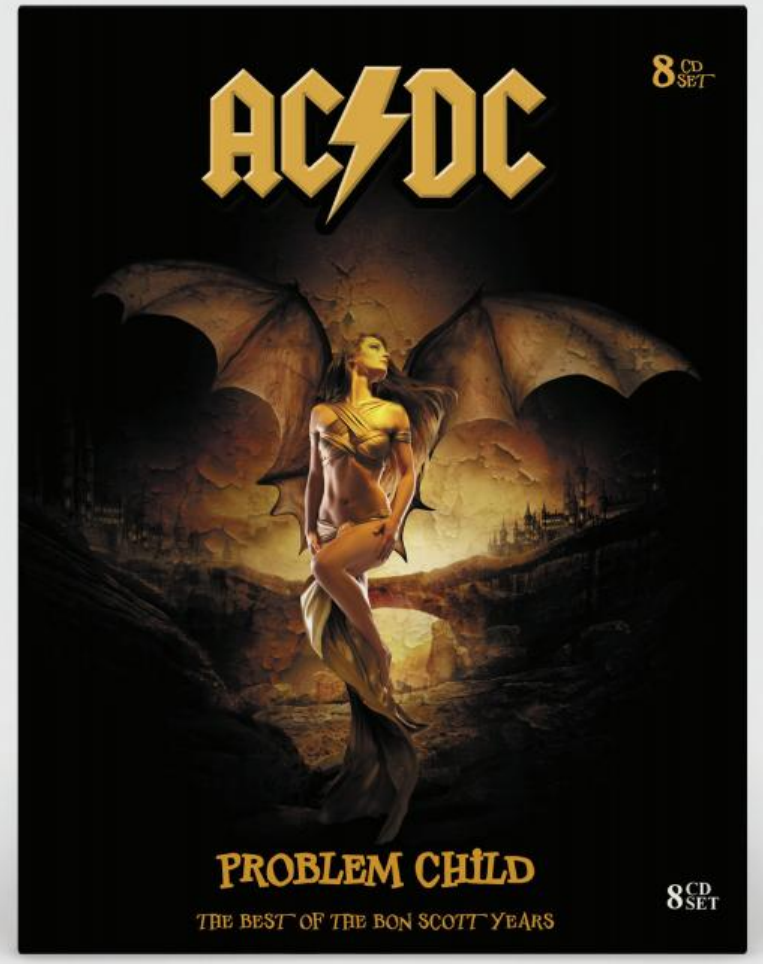

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tight-lipped about it. He just said the boys want you out and that was that. So we decided to try and get it from the horse's mouth, so to speak.

So what happened was we phoned George Martin, and he explained to us – well my mother, Mona, actually – that what he said could have been misconstrued, that what he meant was, fine, we could use a session drummer in the studio, but that he appreciated the charisma of Pete and the qualities he brings to the band, and that what happens in the studio and what happens on stage are totally different.

Whether that got misconstrued, I'll never know, but it was the perfect excuse to get rid of me. We can say that George Martin wants to use a session drummer. Of course, the same thing happened to Ringo initially. Ringo jumps into the hot seat, God bless him, and off he goes, off to London. He sets his gear up and who's there? Andy White. Of course, Andy played on *P.S. I Love You* and *Love Me Do*, and on *Please Please Me*, I think – a couple of takes on that, until eventually some said that enough was enough, and that Ringo was staying on sessions, and thanks, Andy, away you go. So, whether the same thing would have happened to me or not – well, it's academic now, isn't it?

In your opinion, is there much difference in the drumming when you listen to the two versions?

Yeah, there is. I mean, you can tell Andy White's version and Ringo's version of *Love Me Do*. Ringo's is a little bit heavier. My drumming on it was totally different. I think the unfair thing comparing my version with Andy White's and Ringo's is that mine was never supposed to be the final thing; mine was for the purpose of letting George Martin and the sound engineers know what the song was about, to let them think about it. So when I listen to it, I don't hear a finished recording, I hear a glorified demo, so that's one way of looking at it.

The song changed an awful lot when Andy took over with George Martin's arrangement. It was very different compared to the way that we as the Beatles performed *Love Me Do* to the audiences. There was a change of beat in the middle, and it was slower. The change of beat was put in because that was fascinating to the audiences. But, you know, for people to compare my recording with Andy's and Ringo's recordings – you know, they make an unfair judgment on it. I'll be quite open about it. Some people have listened to it and said it would have been better if it had stayed the way we first did it. Other people have said they prefer Andy's version. I suppose that's individual choice. All I am pointing out is that mine wasn't a finished version; it was a glorified demo. Base your understanding or your opinion on that.

The Beatles in 1962, shortly after Pete Best had been dismissed from the group. From left to right: Ringo Starr, Paul McCartney, John Lennon and George Harrison.

How were you sacked, Pete, and how on earth did you feel?

Very quickly, actually. We had played the Cavern the night before and Brian asked if he could see me in the morning. I thought, 'Okay, it's another chew the fat one, talk about promoters – shall we put the price up, what's this venue like?' – the usual business stuff that we talked about all the time. I said, 'Okay, I'll be there about half ten,' or something.

And he said, 'Yeah, that's fine.'

I jumped in the van with Neil [Aspinal] and came home. Neil dropped me off the next morning at NEMS and said he'd wait for me. I said, 'Yeah, I'll only be a few minutes.'

I went into Brian's office and I could tell that he was very aggravated and anxious. We talked round the subject for a while, and then he said, 'Pete, I don't really know to tell you this, but the boys want you out.' He said, 'It's already been arranged,' and I think that was the key phrase.

It had already been arranged that Ringo would join the band on Saturday, and this was either Wednesday or Thursday. It was a bombshell, you know. I walked in cock-a-hoop, not expecting anything bad because there had been no forewarning or indication that they

weren't happy with me in the band or anything like that.

When I was confronted with it, to be quite honest my brain scrambled and I was standing there gasping for air, trying to get my brain to work. I said, 'Well, what's the reason for it?'

The reason that was given was that I wasn't a good enough drummer. They felt Ringo was better, and I've always disputed that. A lot of people who have seen me play then and since have all said it's a matter of personal choice, but at that time I was reputed to be one of the best drummers in the world, so that 'not good enough' thing didn't hold water. It didn't make sense, but at that moment nothing made sense.

I thought, 'Okay, if that's the way they want it, I'm off.' They even asked me to play two gigs with them until Ringo joined! I suppose I was brain-dead, because I agreed to do it, and it was only when I got back home again I thought, 'Hold on a minute – I can't play two gigs with the guys who've just kicked me out.' But Brian even had covered himself on that, because he had Johnny Hutch playing on the same bill, and so when I didn't show up Johnny Hutch stood in for me.

When I walked out of Brian's office Neil was in the van and he saw my face and asked what had happened. I told him I'd been kicked out, and he said he didn't believe it. We didn't say anything until I got back home again, and that's when it all really hit me. So that was it. That was the way I was dismissed, right there.

People have put all sorts of reasons forward for it. What do you reckon, Pete? Will you ever know?

To be quite honest, what was put forward as the reason then – my drumming ability – never made sense. Never did and never will. Then you had other people who say it was because I didn't have my hair cut. Well, no one told me there was going to be a Beatle hairstyle. If they had asked me to comb it down, I would have combed it down. In fact, to prove a point when I went over to America for six months with the Pete Best Combo, I combed my hair down just to say, there, that dispels the hair-dress myth. Then there was jealousy because of the fans' reaction to me; I was becoming too popular. I was antisocial and I wouldn't talk. Some said that Brian felt threatened because I had managed the business side of things before.

It could have been because Brian had – what's the word for it – had approached me, and I had refused. You know, he propositioned me and I said, 'No, I'm not that type of guy.' So a lot of people have said maybe it was because I refused Brian, but that doesn't really add up. I think that now there's possibly only two or there people who know the real reason why I was dismissed. Whether it will ever come out or not, I don't know. There have been so many things said.

The Beatles Anthology shocked me in a way, I suppose, when I was watching it, when George insinuated I was becoming unpunctual and I wasn't turning up for gigs. Hang on a minute! Let's clear up that one. In the two years that I played with them I played over a thousand gigs and I only missed four, so if that's unreliability, or whatever the word is, then, as they say in America, I'll plead the Fifth Amendment.

RIP GINGER BAKER

19 August 1939 ~ 6 October 2019

'I think you have to be totally f*****g insane to want to be a drummer.'

Peter Edward Baker named his 2009 autobiography *Hellraiser: The Autobiography of The World's Greatest Drummer*, a title that tells the reader pretty much all they need to know about Ginger Baker. He very well may have been the world's greatest drummer and he certainly raised hell. In a world as entrenched in ego, debauchery and intense rivalries as the music business, Ginger Baker's star shone bright. Wilder, meaner and generally more talented than his rivals, Baker was the ultimate embodiment of the snarling rock 'n' roll star.

Ginger Baker was born 19 August 1939, in Lewisham, South London. He was a typical (if naughty) child who adored cycling, war stories and his stepfather's dog Rex. Baker's childhood ambition was to join the RAF – he had grown up during the London bombings and actually described them as exciting, saying that he loved all the explosions. The public can probably be thankful that Baker found another way to create explosive sounds, as a man of his temperament behind the controls of a bomber is a truly terrifying thought.

As well as cycling and the Air Training Corps, the young Baker had a passion for drumming. Although he didn't acquire his first set of drums until the age of fifteen, Baker was always drawn to drumming. **'I got into a lot of trouble for disobedience [at school]. One thing I was well known for was drumming on the desks. At this time I was listening to big band music, Jack Parnell and Ted Heath, and we used to go to the local trad jazz clubs where I would focus on the drummer. If the teacher went out of class I'd drum on the desk and the other kids would all start dancing. I'd get so into it that I'd never notice the teacher come back in. Everyone would down and I'd still be drumming.'** – Ginger Baker, *Hellraiser*.

> 'Cream was doomed three months after it started. It was my band, and Jack tried to fire me! I didn't get any of the writing credits. It will piss me off for the rest of my life.'
>
> Ginger Baker

After a difficult time with teachers and school gangs, Baker left school before receiving his results and began working at a ticket-writing firm in Central London. This venture proved to be as ill fated as many of his subsequent career choices (olive farmer, drug dealer, polo club owner) and Baker left after a short time. He was a talented artist and soon secured another position at an advertising company, however it was around this time that Baker really began to explore his passion for music.

'One do the few friends I'd kept at school was a guy called John Finch. He had auburn hair and glasses and came from quite a well-off family. One day he invited me to a party in his house where a band was playing. There were also a lot of kids from school there who well remembered my drumming on the

Cream perform the song 'I Feel Free' on 'Top of the Pops' in London on 25 January 1967. Left to right: Jack Bruce, Ginger Baker and guitarist Eric Clapton.

desks and they began urging, "Go on! Get on the drums!"

'I'd never sat on a kit before in my life, but they all seemed to think that I could play. I'd been watching drummers for years, so I sat down and just played. Two of the horn players turned to each other and said, "Bloody hell, we've got a drummer!"

'A light went on in my head and I thought, "Wow, I'm a drummer!" and that was the end and beginning of everything.' – Ginger Baker, *Hellraiser*

Baker secured himself a toy drum kit and began practicing religiously – practice that paid off when he was offered his first drumming gig with The Storyville Jazzymen. After a short period with the Jazzymen, Baker was offered a position as a member of the Terry Lightfood Jazzmen, which for the eighteen-year-old drummer felt like hitting the big time. After successfully managing to shirk his National Service, Baker spent 1958 travelling around continental Europe with a variety of musicians, including the guitarist Diz Disley. A succession of short-lived musical ventures followed, and although the period was not too eventful career-wise, it is notable as the time that Baker discovered heroin, a presence that would dominate his life for decades to come.

In 1960, Baker teamed up with his hero 'Drum God' Phil Seaman. Seaman became Baker's friend and mentor, and had huge impact on Baker's playing, showing him techniques, giving tips and introducing Baker to his beloved African drum music. This influence helped Baker to expand his style whilst honing his technique, and was one of the attributes that impressed friend and fellow drummer Charlie Watts (of the Rolling Stones). Watts was such a fan of Baker that he suggested Ginger as his replacement in Alexis Korner's Blues Incorporated in 1962, and history was made.

'He took over for me with a band in England, Alexis [Korner's Blues Incorporated], but I used to know him before that – 1960. I first heard Ginger playing in 1959, I think. And he was bloody good then. Don't mean good – I mean bloody good. Him and Jack Bruce used to play in one of the best – well, the most exciting, if it wasn't the best – jazz groups in London. And you don't get in those bands by being half good. They were very good.' – Charlie Watts

After spending some time performing Alexis Korner's Blues Incorporated, and not earning a great deal of cash for their trouble, Ginger Baker and Jack Bruce decided that a new outfit was in order. They 'decided to go commercial and play music that appealed to the public' in an attempt to bring in some revenue and the Graham Bond Organization was born in 1963. Fronted by Graham Bond the outfit enjoyed some moderate success, and was an excellent sounding ground for Baker's initial attempts at songwriting. These attempts included *Camels and Elephants*, which he later expanded on as part of Cream, and it became his signature piece *Toad*.

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Cream in October 1967, shortly before the release of their second album, 'Disraeli Gears'. Released in November 1967, the album went on to reach No. 5 on the UK Albums Chart.

Unfortunately this time also birthed the animosity that continued to characterise Bruce and Baker's working relationship. It seems inevitable that Bruce and Baker were unable to work together for an extended time, as they were both huge characters – deeply creative and undoubtedly fiery. According to Baker it was Bruce's temper that lead to his firing from the Graham Bond Organization, and that Baker was only the messenger, although others have disputed this, claiming that Baker was in fact leading the band at the time and made the decision exclusively. Ginger recalled the incident in an interview with Jim Clash: **'Jack's personality was Jekyll and Hyde. If you said the wrong thing, he would suddenly turn on you. One day during my drum solo, Jack began playing a bass thing with me. I was really getting off on it, phrasing with him on the bass drum. Suddenly he turned around and said, "You're playing too fucking loud." The result was that I nearly killed him. A bouncer had to pull me off.'** Baker continued, **'He was okay for a while, but then he'd yell again. Graham had tried to talk to him, and Jack just got pissed off. When he drove the band bus from Ipswich, he nearly killed us all. Of course, I was the heavy, so I had the job of doing it. But it was a band decision.'**

With the obvious tension between Baker and Bruce it is surprising that either musician agreed to appear in another band together, but that's exactly what happened in 1966, with the formation of legendary supergroup Cream. Although it is worth noting that taking on Jack Bruce as the bass player was a condition of Eric Clapton joining the group, and definitely not an idea of Baker's. Eric Clapton has since recalled his recruitment to the project by Baker stating, **'He came to see me play with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers in Oxford and asked me to form a band. I was frightened of him because he was an angry-looking man with a considerable reputation.'**

Although somewhat terrified by Baker, Clapton was insistent that Bruce joined the band and The Cream made their unofficial debut at the Twisted Wheel on 29 July 1966. The name 'The Cream' came from the idea that the members were the cream of the crop in the music scene (a title that no doubt appealed to the vocally narcissistic Baker). Over time the name was shortened to, simply, Cream, and the trio's domination of the charts began.

Cream went on to produce four stunning albums, each critically

acclaimed. They sold more than fifteen million records and created enduring hits that are instantly recognisable to this day. Their music captured the very essence of the sixties, and oozed quality in lyrical and technical content.

Yet, despite this incredible success, Cream was destined to implode after only two years, and the band split in 1968. Many factors have been cited for the split, but the most common and most obvious reason is Bruce and Baker's vocal dislike of each other. As Baker told Max Bell of *Classic Rock*, **'It has stayed with me to this day. Some wonderful music, some wonderful times, but also some of the most horrendous for me personally. I can remember at the recording studio going down to the bar and drinking Bacardi and Coke, Bacardi and Coke, doing eight or nine of them in order to be able to go back into the studio and not punch people. That's how pissed off I had become. I could see what was happening. In the end, I couldn't take it anymore and Eric was the same.'**

From the ashes of Cream came Blind Faith, a project that was announced only three months after Cream performed their last concert. Blind Faith featured Steve Winwood and Ric Grech of Traffic, alongside Baker and Clapton. Both Winwood and Clapton had felt stifled in their previous bands and wanted to try a more experimental approach, an idea that always appealed to Baker and his love of jazz music. In fact the idea appealed to Baker so much that it has been said, that instead of being invited to join the band, he simply turned up on the doorstep with the words 'Here I am'.

It was never a wise, or particularly safe, idea to refuse Baker and he was accepted in to the band, an appointment that paid off when the band's debut (and only) album shot to No. 1 in the charts. Despite being relatively unprepared, Blind Faith embarked on a tour that took in the UK, Scandinavia and the US. Unfortunately Clapton soon became disillusioned with the project, feeling that he had simply exchanged one supergroup for another, and called an end to the endeavour in August 1969.

This was a disappointment to Baker, who, for once, had been getting on well with his band mates and was enjoying the tour. He was met by Winwood on his return from a holiday to Jamaica and greeted with the news of Blind Faith's split. Fortunately Winwood and Grech mirrored Baker's fondness for their partnership, and agreed to appear in Baker's subsequent group Ginger Baker's Air Force. This was, as always, a fleeting vision and the mammoth ensemble (the original line-up featured eleven musicians) only ever played a few gigs. Ginger Baker's Air Force released two albums in 1970, and received high praise from critics, but the project never really 'took off'.

Following this anticlimax, and the tragic death of his friend Jimi Hendrix, Baker decided he needed a break from London and his drug-fuelled existence there. Never one to do anything by halves, Baker settled on a move to Nigeria, and decided the best method of travel was by car. Tony Palmer filmed this momentous trip for the documentary *Ginger Baker in Africa*, which saw Baker and his trusty Range Rover traversing oceans and deserts. Once he had arrived in Nigeria, Baker opened a 16-track recording studio, inspired by his love of African music and drumming.

> 'It was like a great weight off of my shoulders when it was finished. I was bloody tired of it. I mean, Cream is still an albatross around my neck. It was probably the best musical group ever to come out of Europe. There's nobody ever got near it.'
>
> Ginger Baker

Baker's studio was completed in 1973, and became the first of its kind in West Africa. Despite enjoying some success through the seventies, Baker's studio eventually failed, something he blamed on corrupt local police and government officials, but that might actually have more to do with tax issues or the vast fortune he invested and lost buying polo ponies. Polo had become a passion of Baker's whilst living in Nigeria, and was a hobby and business venture that he continued to explore in the coming decades.

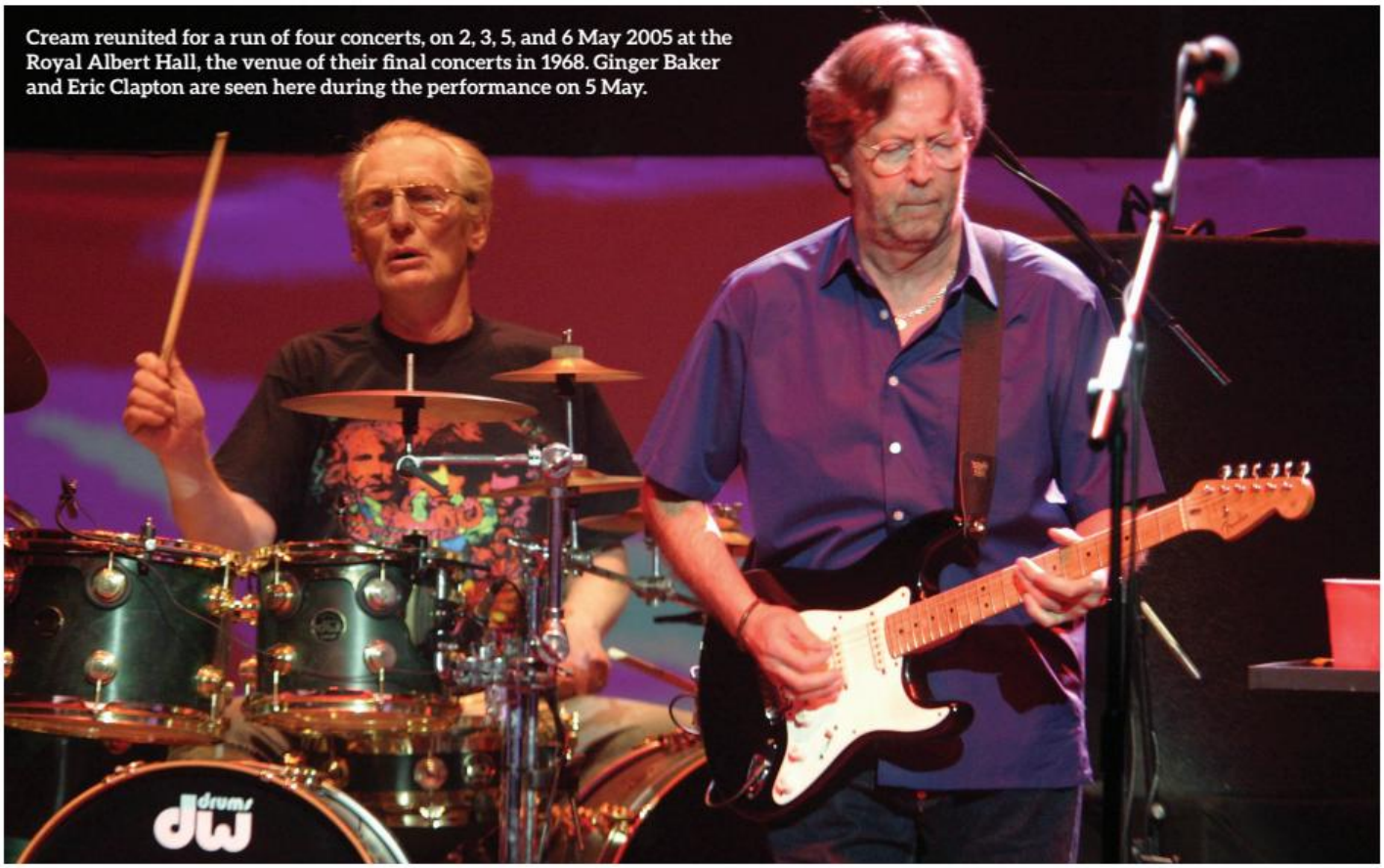
In 1974, Baker formed Baker Gurvitz Army with Paul and Adrian Gurvits, and although the group released three albums over the next two years, the group were disbanded in 1976, having enjoyed only moderate success.

Finding himself penniless and ravaged by drug addiction, Baker left London and headed to the continent in 1981 – this time to an olive farm in Tuscany. It was here that Baker finally kicked his heroin habit for good: **'I moved to a little village in the middle of nowhere, where nobody spoke English. I got into olive farming. It was very rewarding, very hard work, but very good therapy… There's only one person who can help an addict and that's an addict himself. The whole rehab thing is a bloody con to make money and take advantage.'** As with every story regarding Baker there are two sides to the coin, and record producer Bill Laswell claims to have 'rescued' Baker from the farm some years later: **'The farm was a disaster. There was no electricity and he had this tiny bed he would sleep in with his dogs. It's a miracle that he was still alive.'** It has certainly been reported that it was the local mafia who ran Baker out of Italy after suspecting him of selling drugs, whatever the truth of the matter it was a classically confused and volatile situation.

In 1980–1990, Baker appeared with a number of different bands such as Hawkwind – a band he described as 'fucking appalling', and Public Image Limited – 'I didn't give a fuck. I just took the money'.

This was followed by a slightly more protracted stint with the American hard rock outfit Masters of Reality. Despite the age gap, Baker proved to be a valuable asset to the band and is fondly remembered by lead singer Chris Goss: **'He is a brilliant, god-gifted musician… We can make grooves forever, sit in a room and write songs forever.'**

Baker continued his run of short-lived projects with the release of the 1994



Cream reunited for a run of four concerts, on 2, 3, 5, and 6 May 2005 at the Royal Albert Hall, the venue of their final concerts in 1968. Ginger Baker and Eric Clapton are seen here during the performance on 5 May.

album *Around the Next Dream* by BBM. BBM (Bruce Baker Moore) was a project that had been cooked up between Baker, Jack Bruce and guitarist Gary Moore in late 1993, and their debut album enjoyed moderate chart success before the group disbanded after a short UK tour. The image on the album cover has since become synonymous with Ginger Baker, and is one of the great pieces of rock iconography. The photo shows the star smoking a cigarette, flanked with two white angel wings, and was also used for the cover of Baker's autobiography.

Around this time Baker also formed The Ginger Baker Trio with Bill Frisell and Charlie Haden, and moved to Colorado where he opened the Mile High Polo Club. The polo club was a bizarre venture that boasted notorious gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson and famous trumpeter Ron Miles as board members. In 1995, Baker was interviewed by Linda Gruno and enthused about the project: **'We're trying to bring polo back as a spectator sport. That's the main thing we're working on now. We're really quite stoked at the reaction to it all… I think jazz and polo are two art forms that people should see more of and we're going to try and do more of those things.'**

Unsurprisingly, this project also folded and Baker was forced to leave America in 1999, after difficulties arose concerning his visa and the IRS. The globetrotting star then moved out to South Africa, where he lived on his now infamous ranch that welcomed guests with a sign reading 'Beware of Mr. Baker'.

Cream reformed in May 2005 for a string of reunion shows that were spectacularly received. The band played the Royal Albert Hall in London on four nights, however by the time the planned American dates rolled round later that year, Baker and Bruce's animosity was once again uncontainable and the shows were a disaster. Ginger relayed his version of events to Max Bell for *Classic Rock*: **'Jack's behaviour was different. He behaved like a prick, grabbing the microphone, dancing all over the stage. The Albert Hall was one of the most enjoyable gigs I've done; Madison Square Garden was a fucking disaster. Jack apologised to me afterwards because he'd freaked out at me in front of the whole audience for playing too loud on *We're Going Wrong*. That was the last straw. He thinks he can do that then say sorry? It was why we split up in the first place.'**

Despite his advancing years Baker toured with Ginger Baker's Jazz Confusion in 2013–2014. The Confusion was comprised of Baker, percussionist Abass Dodoo, bassist Alec Dankworth and saxophonist Alfred 'Pee Wee' Ellis. The outfit released the album *Why?* in 2014, but had to cancel all upcoming shows when Baker was diagnosed with severe aortic stenosis in 2016.

So ended the illustrious career of one of rock's all time greats. Baker passed away peacefully on 6 October 2019, and there has been an outpouring of tributes from the rock scene – the world will miss his exceptional talent and creativity. To have lived to see eighty, at all, seems an incredible achievement for a man of Baker's wildness, however as his ex-wife put it, 'The devil looks after his own'.

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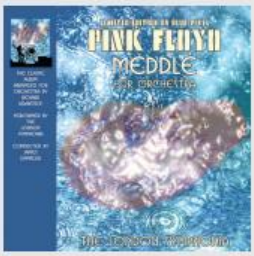

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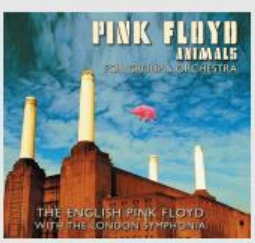

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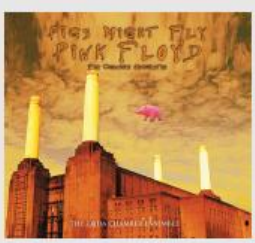

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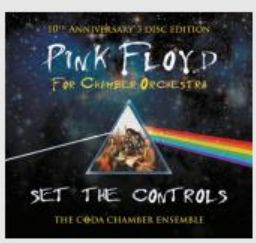

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THE BIG QUESTIONS

We asked and you answered! For each issue we will be putting the big questions to the public. We will be finding answers to the queries that rock fans have debated for decades. Keep an eye on our social media platforms to have your say in our next poll.

This issue we asked…

Who is the greatest frontman of all time?

The results are in; they have been checked, double-checked, triple-checked and verified, and the winner is… *drum roll please…*

Freddie Mercury

Freddie Mercury – of course Freddie Mercury. The vivacious superstar absolutely stole the show as always, running away with nearly eighty percent of the votes. He is a true icon with one of the most important musical legacies the world has ever seen. From his early days with Queen to his later solo material, everything Freddie did was unique, exceptional and filled with panache. Here we look at some of his greatest moments.

Freddie Mercury in 1975 – the year that heralded the release of Queen's fourth studio album 'A Night at the Opera'.

Greatest Song
Bohemian Rhapsody

Freddie Mercury's magnum opus, *Bohemian Rhapsody* has gone down in history as one of the greatest songs ever – it's certainly one of the most popular. The song shot to No. 1 when it was released, and reclaimed the position in 1991 following Freddie Mercury's death. It is now the third-best-selling single of all time in the UK, and has racked up over one billion views on YouTube.

The musicality displayed throughout the six-minute epic is immense, and the track's popularity is a testament to Queen's artistry. At the time it was unusual for a single to be six minutes in length, and Queen were told that no radio show would play it; in fact the record label didn't want to release *Bohemian Rhapsody* as a single at all. Still, Queen was more than confident in the quality of the song and thankfully, insisted that it become a single.

Queen had begun recording *Bohemian Rhapsody* on 24 August 1975, at the Rockfield Studios in Monmouth, Wales, however it was eventually finished off at Wessex Sound Studios, Roundhouse, Sarm East Studios and Scorpio Sound. An incredible amount of studios that reflects the incredible amount of work that went in to the recording process. There were 160 layers of vocal overdubs on the choral section alone, and the operatic interlude took an entire week to record.

It is no wonder that Freddie was keen to get the song perfect, as it was actually a number he had been working on since the sixties. Although the many sections of the song had originally been intended to comprise three or more individual tracks, but once Freddie found the idea of combining them in to one extravagantly extended number he was hooked.

Brian May recalled, **'I remember Freddie coming in with loads of bits of paper from his dad's work, like Post-it notes, and pounding on the piano. He played the piano like most people play the drums. And this song he had was full of gaps where he explained that something operatic would happen here and so on. He'd worked out the harmonies in his head.'**

The work that Queen and their team put in to the song's production paid off, and was bolstered by an incredible music video (often touted as the first of its kind) that propelled the single in to rock history when it first appeared on *Top of the Pops* in November 1975. *Rolling Stone* magazine have recognised the video's importance making clear that it, 'cannot be overstated, practically inventing the music video seven years before MTV went on the air.'

The stripped back video took only three hours to make, and shows Freddie and the band at their best. The iconic frontman's performances were such an important part of Queen's success that it is no surprise they were among the first to use video like this, as incredible songs deserve incredible performances, and there is something about seeing Freddie live in action that simply can not be captured by audio alone.

Despite widespread speculation, Freddie never exactly explained the lyrics to *Bohemian Rhapsody* preferring to let the listener interpret them individually: **'It is one of those songs, which has such a fantasy feel about it. I think people should just listen to it, think about it, and then make up their own minds as to what it says to them.'**

Officially the most streamed song of the 20th Century, an unavoidable karaoke staple and now with a hit Hollywood biopic of the same name, it seems that the popularity of *Bohemian Rhapsody* isn't fading away any time soon, and we for one are very glad. Carry on, carry on!

Queen on stage in 1977. In July of that year the band entered the studio to begin work on their sixth studio album 'News of the World'.

Greatest Album
News of the World

Though the album may be considered a slightly controversial choice for this accolade given the runaway success of *A Night at the Opera*, for the musical diversity, artistic reinvention and the ability to remain quintessentially Queen whilst expanding the band's sound – we say *News of the World*.

News of the World was released in October 1977 amidst the fury of the punk explosion. This musical revolution saw many big stars of the time floundering, now adrift in a tide of new sentiment that saw them as bourgeois dinosaurs, out of touch with the youth of the day. Gone were the extended solos, lavish productions and progressive pieces that had been the hallmark of the mid-1970s progressive rock scene. Songs that were released to universal acclaim only two years prior (such as *Bohemian Rhapsody*) were now the polar opposite of what was deemed to be cool, and it was time for bands to adapt or be left behind.

Whilst many groups sank in the volatile musical climate, Queen swam confidently in to a new era. *News of the World* was recorded over just two months in 1977 at Sarm West and Wessex Sound Studios, London. This short time frame reflected the group's new approach, speaking of which Mercury said, **'I feel the Queen style of well produced or production sort of albums is over. We've done to death multi-tracked harmonies and, for our own sakes and for the public's, we want to go on to a different sort of project. And the next album will be that.'**

The new album certainly was that, with a stripped back sound and a shortened length. The record captured the feeling of the time, and the influence of punk on the music scene, but remained homage rather than imitation. An album that was of the times, but not defined by them – progressive but still unmistakably Queen.

There's no better mark of this than the album's openers, the magnificent *We Are the Champions* and *We Will Rock You*. To open an album with a track called *We Will Rock You* is a bold statement of intent, if ever there was one, and Queen undeniably delivers here. These are shorter tracks, with a harder sound than previous Queen releases, but they have indisputably become Queen classics, as instantly recognisable and well-loved as any number.

What really stood out on *News of the World* was the musical scope. From the anthemic stadium hits, to the funky *Fight from the Inside* and the punk sounds of *Sheer Heart Attack*, everything is represented perfectly. The contrast between the tracks on the album only serves to highlight the skill and confidence that Queen bring to each of the numbers, and in a world of bands that were losing their place, Queen were asserting theirs – at the top.

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Beloved by all for his charm and wit, Freddie was best admired for his astonishing musical gifts and his dazzling showmanship. Here we hear from his contemporaries, as they share fond recollections of the singer's talent and character.

David Bowie
Of all the more theatrical performers, Freddie took it further than the rest. He took it over the edge. And of course I always admire a man who wears tights!

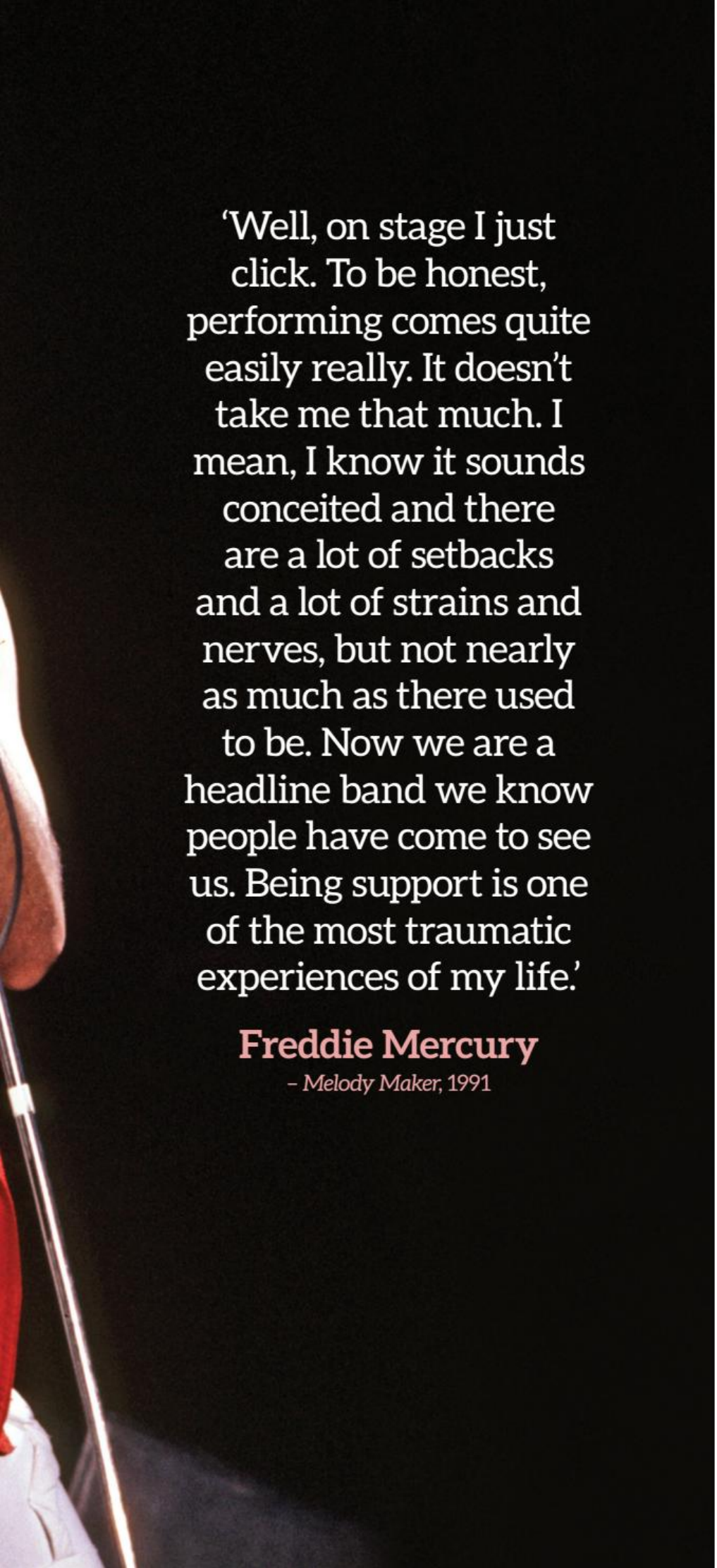
Axl Rose
If I hadn't had Freddie Mercury's lyrics to hold on to as a kid I don't know where I would be. It taught me about all forms of music... it would open my mind. I never really had a bigger teacher in my whole life.

Robert Plant
There's so few people behind the glamour who really make it as true performers. It's a very strange thoroughbred condition to be a successful musician and still be able to project it with confidence. Freddie had that, and there's not many people who have had it.

Elton John
Freddie is a real one off and at that time nobody looked like him, or sang like him with the harmonies and everything.

Chris Cornell
I think Freddie Mercury is probably the best of all time in terms of a rock voice. There was a vulnerability to it, his technical ability was amazing, and so much of his personality would come out through his voice. I'm not even a guy to buy Queen records, really, and I still think he's one of the best.

Francis Rossi
Freddie was one of the elite few who could really set a stadium straight. Along with millions of fans throughout the world, I will miss his exceptional performance and brilliant voice.



'Well, on stage I just click. To be honest, performing comes quite easily really. It doesn't take me that much. I mean, I know it sounds conceited and there are a lot of setbacks and a lot of strains and nerves, but not nearly as much as there used to be. Now we are a headline band we know people have come to see us. Being support is one of the most traumatic experiences of my life.'

Freddie Mercury

– Melody Maker, 1991

Annie Lennox

For me he represents an era when people were less afraid of living life to the full. This was in the seventies when rock's extravagances went beserk. Perhaps we're not living in that time any more. There's a glorious rebelliousness about it, of freedom attached to it, that represents that whole spirit of rock 'n' roll.

Brian May

He wanted to change the world in some ways and make music that no one had ever made and Freddie had complete, utter confidence. 'Yes of course darling, of course we'll do it' – completely unrealistic at the time but here we are. So that's what makes me feel rather nice about being here, to come back here and he's a hero here and that's nice; he deserves to be a hero.

Roger Taylor

To be honest I think Freddie would have hated the idea of being sixty, he would have been appalled and so would we.

No-one really knew Freddie. He was shy, gentle and kind. He wasn't the person he put over on stage.

Alongside the showman, he was a rather shy introvert. But if the attention was focused on him, he was a natural star, as we all saw after we put Queen together. Week by week, we saw him grow into this character, Freddie Mercury.

Jer Bulsara – Freddie's Mother

He respected us, no matter wherever he was around the world he used to phone to let us know he was OK.

Freddie Mercury

When I'm dead, I want to be remembered as a musician of some worth and substance.

I always knew I was a star and now, the rest of the world seems to agree with me.'

'You can be anything you want to be, just turn yourself into anything you think that you ever could be.'
– Freddie Mercury

Greatest Performance
Live Aid, 13 July 1985

Undoubtedly the greatest appearance at Live Aid – Freddie's performance at the event has even been voted the greatest of all time. Organiser Bob Geldof suggested that acts stuck to playing their hit singles, and Queen took this firmly on board, unleashing a stunning medley of their greatest hits to an awestruck audience.

Queen opened their slot with Mercury sat at a piano performing the first half of *Bohemian Rhapsody*, before moving on to *Radio Ga Ga*, which merged in to the famous vocal improvisation of *Ay-Oh*. Here, Freddie lead the audience, as he and 72,000 spectators sang in unison. It was a bewitching moment, and Freddie's spine-tingling extended bit was described as 'the note that was heard around the world'. For a long show of many highlights from an exceptional line-up, it is incredible to be able to pinpoint the finest note performed, but most would agree that this was it.

Queen then stormed in to a rendition of their single *Hammer to Fall*, before Freddie treated the audience to a change of pace with his self-penned number *Crazy Little Thing Called Love*. No Queen performance of this magnitude would be complete without the staple classics *We Will Rock You* and *We Are the Champions*. Queen performed a truncated version of *We Will Rock You*, before giving it their all for the big finale number. Freddie Mercury's delivery of *We Are the Champions* at Live Aid is one of the most dramatic and unforgettable performances of all time. The intensity and passion he clearly displayed, along with his striking vocals combined to deliver chills across the watching world.

Queen had wisely chosen their time slot for the show, late enough for the global broadcast to have begun, but early enough to still be peak viewing time in Britain, and Queen's performance was watched by an estimated 1.9 billion viewers. This would seem to be the perfect platform for a performer that thrived on attention and audience adulation, however Jim Hutton mentioned in his 1994 autobiography that upon leaving the stage Freddie was so shaken he had to down a glass of vodka and was heard to remark 'Thank God that's over!'

Fortunately, once the adrenaline had passed Freddie was just as pleased with the performance as the astonished audience had been, and on leaving his trailer he encountered Elton John, who, grinning from ear to ear greeted Queen with the cry, 'You Bastards! You stole the show!' This sentiment was mirrored by event organiser Bob Geldof, who has remarked that Queen were the highlight in a day of momentous performances: **'Queen were absolutely the best band of the day. They played the best, had the best sound, used their time to the full. They understood the idea exactly, that it was a global jukebox. They just went and smashed one hit after another. It was the perfect stage for Freddie – the whole world.'**

The universal acclaim for Queen's performance in 1985 is undoubtedly well deserved, however Brian May has since alluded that the group may have had a slight advantage over the competition. May insinuated that Trip Khalaf, Queen's sound engineer was able to adjust the volume for the band's set (although a representative Hill Pro Audio who supplied the sound systems for Live Aid has deemed this physically impossible).

In 1999, May confided to *Mojo* magazine, **'We didn't have a sound check, but we sent our brilliant engineer to check the system, so he set all the limiters for us. We were louder than anyone else. I remember being in the audience and hearing the first few acts thinking that I could hardly hear them. You've got to overwhelm the crowd in a stadium.'**

Overwhelm the crowd they did, and the iconic performance proved an enormous boost to Queen – a band that had recently found themselves lacking inspiration. When they were asked to perform at Live Aid, Queen had actually been hesitant to accept the offer, but it proved to be a triumphant rebirth for the band that saw Freddie firmly back in the frame as their superstar frontman.

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Gypsy, **Look At Yourself**, **July Morning**, **Tears In My Eyes**, **Easy Livin'** and many more.

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CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL

Keepin' On Chooglin'

The music of Creedence Clearwater Revival has proved timeless, remaining as powerful and fresh today as when it stormed the charts. In an era so rich in musical talent Creedence shone bright, a shooting star that ultimately faded out after five short years. Here we look at the period of the bands peak success, from early 1969 through to their unfortunate split in 1972.

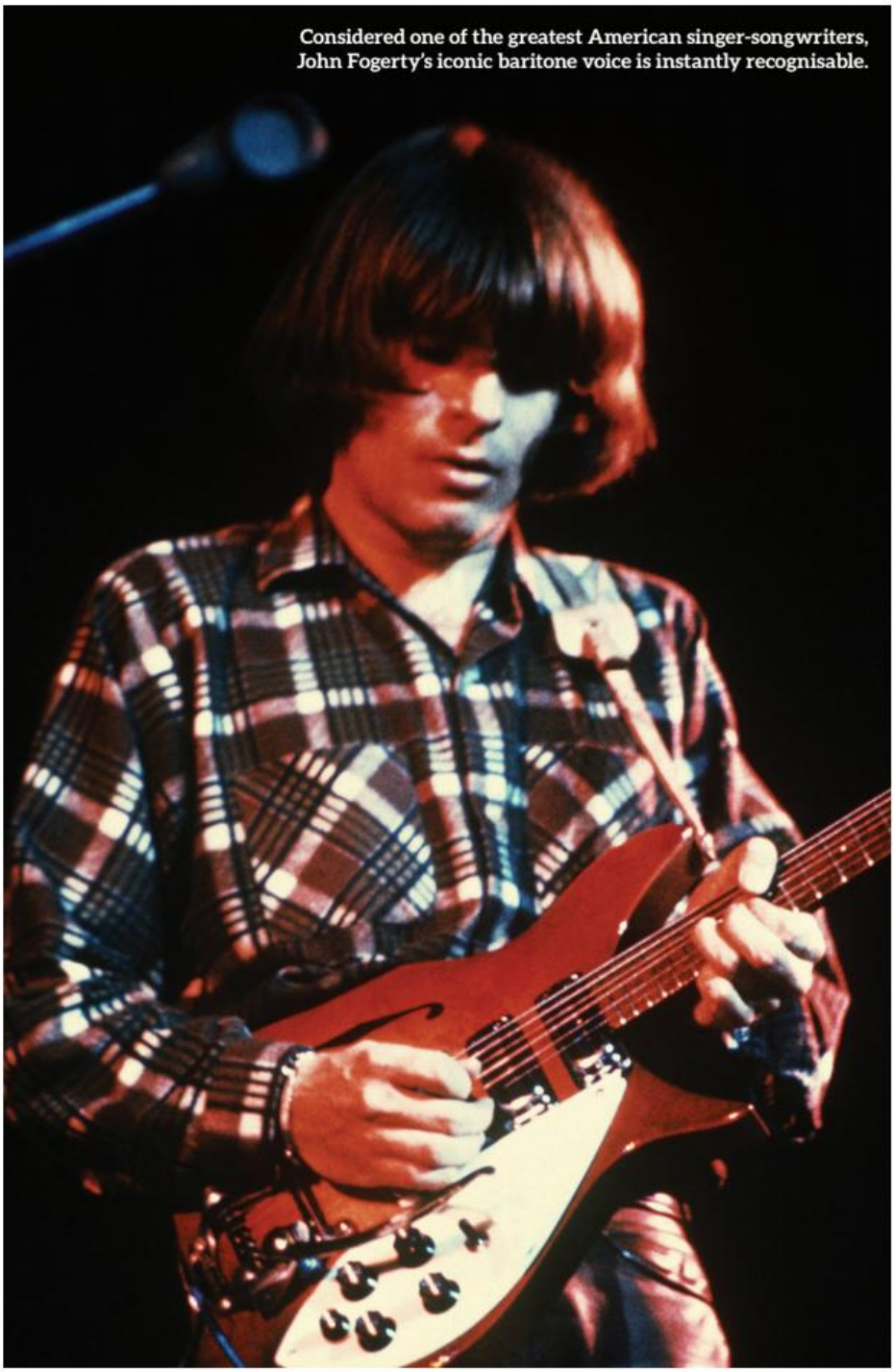
There can be no doubt that much of the inspiration for Creedence's signature sound came from the late fifties rock 'n' roll and R&B that the band had grown up listening to. At their peak Creedence Clearwater Revival could produce a seemingly endless supply of timeless three-minute rock classics showcasing vocals delivered so powerfully by John Fogerty that one can't help but sit up and listen. Creedence created some of the finest moments of the late sixties and early seventies – songs perfectly crafted for radio and television that are still played regularly today.

This is the story of a truly American band who achieved world wide success, outsold most and left a hugely influential catalogue of work before burning out all too quickly.

Creedence Clearwater Revival's second studio album *Bayou Country* was released in January 1969. It had been written whilst John Fogerty was apparently busy with part-time soldiering and living back in his hometown of El Cerrito with his wife. However, what he had really been doing was listening to every conceivable new sound and writing furiously to help push the Creedence name further. The artistic fruits of this time are undying classics, evidencing influences from rock legends such as Bo Diddley – songs that paint a picture of life in a time gone by in the Deep South. Fogerty's lyrics invoke images of southern swampland, New Orleans dive bars and a hard life under a hot sun. All of this is quite remarkable when you consider that up until that point Fogerty had never even been to the South and in fact most of his inspiration was taken from films and well-worn books.

Fogerty's hard work paid off when the smash hit *Proud Mary* came out ahead of *Bayou Country* and propelled the band to a whole new level of success, heralding the arrival of a rich vein of creativity that lasted until the departure of his brother and band mate, Tom Fogerty, in 1971.

John Fogerty recalled the genesis of Creedence's new sound in conversation with *Uncut* magazine in 2012: **'*Bayou Country* really stated what Creedence Clearwater Revival was and should be. There were hints of it on the first album. The singing is good, and the band plays well; it just doesn't sound as authentic as Stax. But *Bayou Country* just lands very authoritatively. The title track, with that droning chord and that whole spooky thing, that's such a great opening. And the cover shot, which was just by accident, was spooky and undefined, and it did nothing to dispel the vision.'**



Considered one of the greatest American singer-songwriters, John Fogerty's iconic baritone voice is instantly recognisable.

Riding high on the success of *Bayou Country*, Creedence were on unstoppable form in 1969, performing at the iconic Woodstock Festival and churning out hit after swampy hit. The proliferation of material at this time was evidenced by the arrival of a follow up album the very same year. In August 1969, Creedence Clearwater Revival achieved the near impossible and released a killer successor to *Bayou Country*. This was their third album within fourteen months and despite some indications of pressure building up within the band, it is a feel good album that has stood the test of time impeccably.

Green River astounded critics, taking the charts by storm and living up to its name with a fresh, green, hopeful sound. This lightness was counterbalanced with a maturing mix of heavy throwbacks to late fifties American rock and Creedence's trademark roots rock sound. The wonderfully crafted numbers on the album are driven by John Fogerty's remarkable vocals, some of the tightest rhythm guitar one could wish to hear courtesy of Tom Fogerty, Stu Cook's excellent bass and Doug Clifford's distinctive drumming.

By this point in history, the summer of love was long passed and the hippie movement was beginning to fade, disillusionment was creeping in to the

Creedence Clearwater Revival in 1968. Left to right: John Fogerty, Tom Fogerty, Stu Cook and Doug Clifford. At their peak Creedence could produce a seemingly endless supply of timeless three-minute rock classics.

American psyche, fuelled by civil unrest and the Vietnam War. *Green River*'s lyrics reflect this in places, showing hints of a generation's hope going sour, of frustration, of warning and disenchantment.

Seemingly the innocence of the acid generation had somehow turned and bitten it back. When John Fogerty wrote the track *Green River*, the eponymous river was presented as a place of safety for when world became too fierce, and ends with the words 'You're gonna find the world is smoulderin', and if you get lost come on home to Green River'.

The cover photograph for *Green River* did away with any pretence of Creedence being an equal partnership and showed the band in a group gathered well behind John Fogerty, who dwarfs the others. This seems to reflect his new dominance of the band (John Fogerty had taken over songwriting almost entirely, amongst other roles), a dominance that proved difficult to stomach for older brother Tom. As a songwriter himself, the volume of work coming from John stifled Tom Fogerty, he found himself with no platform for his own material as his tracks were shelved to make way for John's commercial smash hits. The value of Tom's artistic endeavours became very apparent when, following his departure from Creedence, he produced a whole catalogue of quality material that hadn't made the cut for the band's releases.

> 'They weren't the hippest band in the world, just the best.'
>
> BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

Tom Fogerty had, at a point, written the material for Creedence, lead the group, played most of the guitar work, signed the contracts and been the lead singer. At one moment in time, the band was even named after him and yet he now found himself being nudged further and further into the background. These developments meant internal conflict within band and family members was regrettably inevitable.

Unaware of the rising tensions within the band, the listening public lapped up *Green River* and the release thrust Creedence in to the highest echelons of fame, cementing their place in rock history. Capitalising on this success, Creedence almost immediately began work on their next album, which

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U2
WE WILL FOLLOW
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U2 – WE WILL FOLLOW
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U2's second studio album *October* was released on 12 October 1981. From September to November 1982, the group recorded *War*. The following year U2 embarked on the *War* tour of Europe, the US and Japan. These stunning releases showcase the very best of U2 broadcasting live to air from this period – a band at the peak of their powers.

FEATURED TRACKS INCLUDE:

Gloria, **New Year's Day**, **Two Hearts Beat As One**, **Sunday Bloody Sunday** and many more.

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was produced over an astonishingly short period, being released only three months after *Green River*. Public anticipation for *Willy and the Poor Boys* was stoked by the release of singles *Down On the Corner* and the monster hit *Fortunate Son*, and the album hit the shops to a tidal wave of enthusiasm, selling out within days.

Willy and the Poor Boys brought the third platinum award for Creedence, and like it's two predecessors, spent over a year in the album charts eventually reaching No. 3. This really was a band on fire – Creedence had produced a line of short, highly marketable singles that demanded attention and fitted well within the time frame of rigid national radio. This was a time of experimentalism and of acid fuelled space jams that meandered through abstract and extended tracks. Yet, the almost uncool Creedence kept to their successful formula producing commercial hit after hit and only allowed themselves to expand to any degree whilst live on stage. This disciplined approach and the band's strait-laced lifestyle, lead to the group being seen somewhat square, even as they were one of the biggest rock acts in the world. In interview with *The Guardian* John Fogerty mused over his dedication to Creedence's career: **'Yes I was very disciplined. Were there any drugs involved? Yeah, I smoked a little pot. I think my bandmates smoked quite a bit more pot. I had rules: never do that when we're recording, never do that when we're playing. To me it was a competition. You'd have the Grateful Dead and Jefferson Airplane talking like, "We don't want to be successful, maaaaan." One thing, I wasn't sure I believed them and for another, why would I go to all this trouble and only sell one record to my mom? I wasn't embarrassed that I was ambitious. We wanted to be the best we could be.'**

It is true that Creedence were seen as too commercial by some of their contemporaries but their enviable success was also recognised as being highly deserved, as John Fogerty's seemingly endless supply of hits – delivered with trademark musicianship – continued at a remarkable pace. When *Willy and the Poor Boys* arrived, continuing a relentless flow of creativity, it seemed that the band could do no wrong. Once again John Fogerty in particular, had somehow produced an album that not only followed on from previous successes but also added to them and further enhanced their almost invincible position in the charts with yet another set of memorable

Creedence Clearwater Revival in December 1969. Left to right: Doug Clifford, Stu Cook, Tom Fogerty and John Fogerty.

tracks – anyone waiting for Creedence to trip up had a while to wait yet.

Despite the incredibly short gap between the release of *Green River* and *Willy and the Poor Boys*, there is nothing rushed about the album – all the influences are there, the blues, soul, rhythm and blues, rock and country, all blend gloriously into a distinctive sound. In amongst this richness of material there are several stand out tracks, but none more memorable than *Fortunate Son* – an overtly powerful political message delivered by a band with first-hand experience of the subject matter. Powerfully written and superbly produced, *Fortunate Son* captured the zeitgeist of the time – fuelled passionate demonstrations, civil unrest and overtly political music. The song's message is clear and it became an unofficial anthem of the anti-war movement and the working classes that were being drafted in to fight.

John Fogerty spoke to *Ulimate Classic Rock* about his feelings on the song's adoption by the anti-war movement stating, **'I'm very proud of the association. It was a very unique time in American history, and my songs are still identified with that. The protesters took those songs to heart but so did the guys [who] were GIs and had to go to Vietnam. That was a fact. Because I was in the Army, there was an insight I had that a lot of the protesters didn't have. They'd argue with my acquaintances, and I'd say, "That guy that you're hurling epithets at, that soldier over there. He's nineteen years old. He likes all the same stuff you like. It's just that, there but for fortune, he has to go fight because the government tells him that's what he has to do. So, he's doing it." It's just silly to be protesting your policy differences toward the soldiers. He doesn't have a choice in the matter. It's the president who has the choice. Go do your thing to him.'**

After all their success many wondered if the rich creative vein that Creedence, and John Fogerty in particular, had explored had become exhausted. But they once again astonished critics by releasing *Cosmo's Factory* in August 1970, which became the band's fifth massive hit record in just over two years. Once again it contained some hugely successful singles in the form of No. 2 hit *Travellin' Band*, the equally strong *Who'll Stop the Rain* and the No. 4 release *Up Around the Bend*. Unusually, Creedence were signed to an

Creedence Clearwater Revival in October 1970.
Creedence created some of the finest moments of the late sixties and early seventies – songs perfectly crafted for radio and television that are still played regularly today.

independent record label called Fantasy, who went on to release a further single from the album *Lookin' Out My Back Door*, which also reached No. 2 in the US charts. *Cosmo's Factory* was not only a commercial success but also an enormous hit with the critics. A 1970 review of the album in the *Who Put the Bomp!* fanzine saw journalist Greg Shaw lauding the group's efforts, a sentiment that was mirrored almost universally: **'Well, they've finally done it. Creedence Clearwater has produced an entire album without a single poor song. And what's more, they don't all sound alike. Technically, all four members of the group are playing better than ever before; Fogerty's improvement as a guitarist is uncanny – even since the last album his inventiveness and the number of styles at his command have more than doubled, it seems.'**

Cosmo's Factory conquered the charts, remaining at No. 1 for an incredible nine weeks in the US, and it seemed as if, in light of this success the band were now taking a well-earned break. In reality, internal conflict had begun to bite, and despite all seeming well on the outside, the rifts within the band were widening. There was almost a sense of inevitability about the final dispute that brought about the collapse of Creedence – the situation simply could not go on forever. Personalities, relationships and artistic ideas dictated otherwise, and Tom Fogerty's time with the band was coming to an end, as he struggled with his stifled desire for musical expression. Unsurprisingly, he was not content to simply become one of his younger brother's backing band, as in many ways it was Tom that held the band together; a quality musician in every sense of the phrase, Tom had formed Creedence, believed in their talent and nudged the group along a path that brought such incredible success.

'I wasn't embarrassed that I was ambitious. We wanted to be the best we could be.'

JOHN FOGERTY

Doug Clifford has always stated Tom's importance within the band, and explained his role to *USA Today*: **'It was Tom who took us along with him to record because his band didn't see the**

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FEATURED TRACKS INCLUDE:

London Calling, **Tommy Gun**, **White Riot**, **English Civil War**, **I Fought the Law**, **Complete Control**, **Clash City Rockers**, **Train In Vain**, **The Magnificent Seven**, **Bank Robber**, **Rock the Casbah**, **Should I Stay or Should I Go** and many more.

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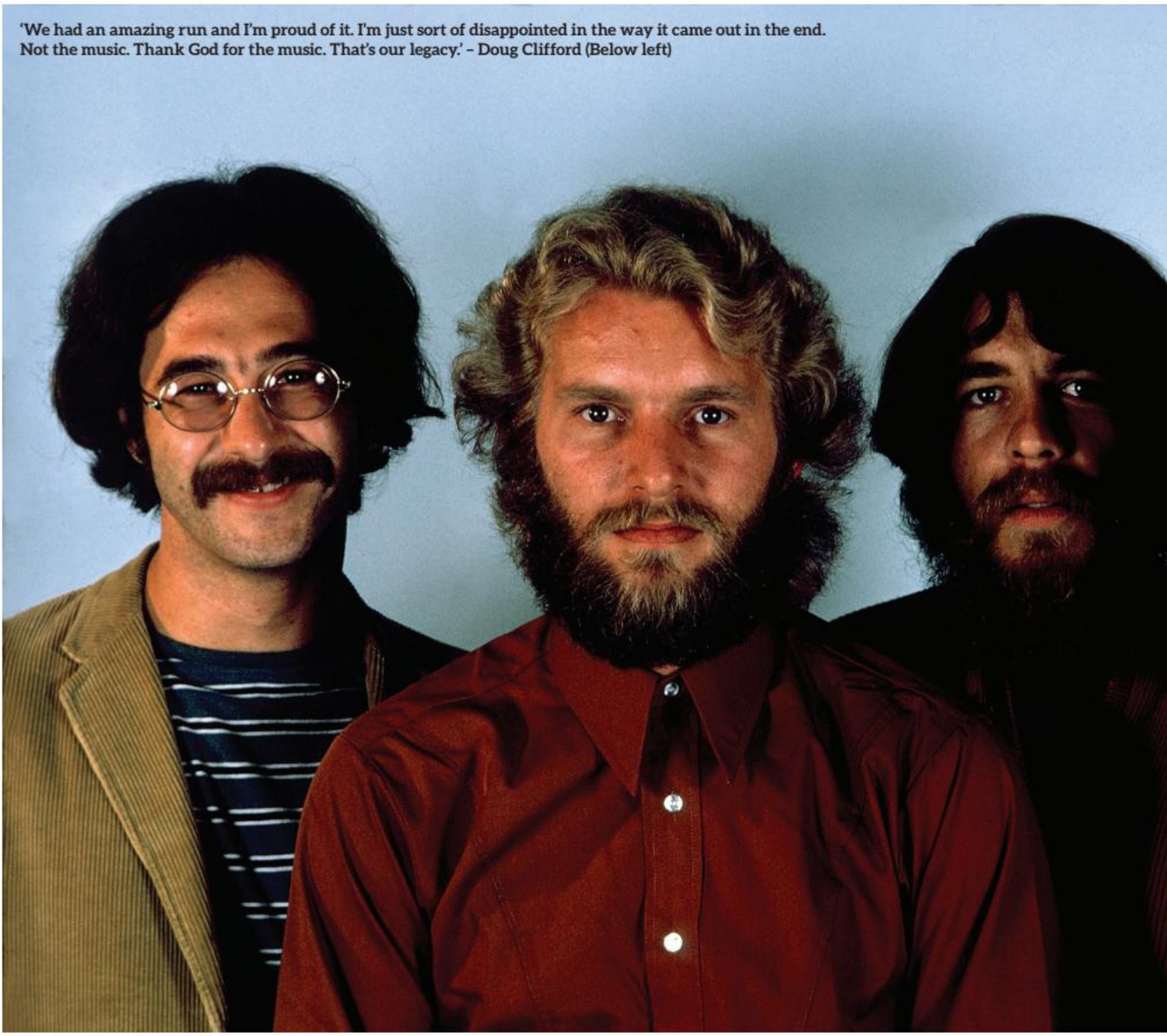


'We had an amazing run and I'm proud of it. I'm just sort of disappointed in the way it came out in the end. Not the music. Thank God for the music. That's our legacy.' – Doug Clifford (Below left)

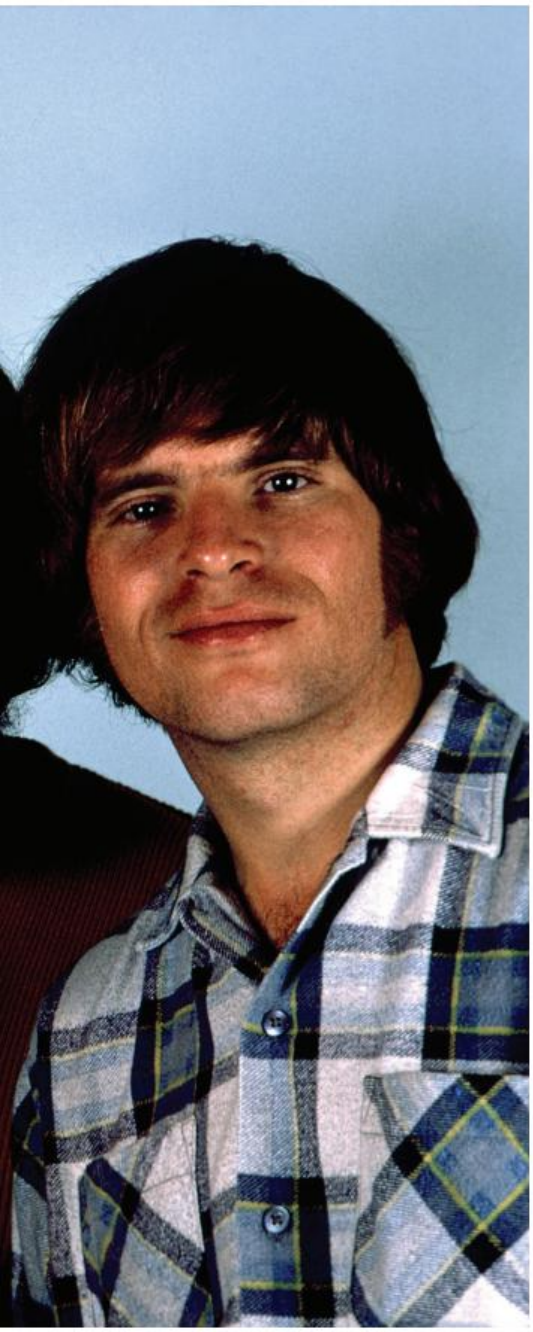
opportunity that was presented to them. But he believed in us and stuck with us the whole time. He paid for the recordings. He had a wife, two kids, a house and a mortgage. And he was just wonderful. Without Tom, we wouldn't be talking. There wouldn't have been a Creedence Clearwater Revival. When Tom graciously gave up the vocals to his younger brother, he had no idea that he would never be singing another song again. So Stu and I, and Tom were always at odds with John about that. Tom had a high tenor voice like his brother but he had what I call a sweet tenor, like Ritchie Valens. I think John was afraid that if Tom had a hit, he'd lose control. And John is a control freak.'

Cosmo's Factory was, arguably, the last truly great Creedence album, featuring classics such as the chooglin' *Run Through the Jungle* and the release saw the group at the zenith of their career, meaning that unfortunately there was only way to go. The album was a huge success selling a cool five million records, yet some music publications dismissed Creedence as simply a commercial hit factory, a slight that stung John Fogerty, and lead him to seek even greater power within the band.

John sought to control the public perception of Creedence by bringing in a major public relations company from Hollywood and tasking them with creating an image for the group that would lead to spin off merchandising sales. In 1970 the idea was certainly innovative, yet it seemed to stem from an almost paranoiac response to not receiving the acclaim that John felt was long overdue.

The rest of the band stood and watched as the empire grew, but also as some of the original ideals of the band began to dissolve in endless business meetings and money spinning ideas.

Amongst this, the cracks were opening up and the cover of the album *Pendulum* displays a band clearly showing the strain. Tom, Stu and Doug finally confronted John, attempting to wrestle back some form of control and democracy within Creedence but the writing was well and truly on the wall. The recording sessions for *Pendulum* proved disastrous for relationships within the band, as John wrote the majority of the material for the album and set about recording it with an impossible attention to detail that the rest of the members found highly frustrating. This pursuit for perfection saw John handing out complicated



musical arrangements for the members and expecting marathon practice sessions, which went down poorly the rest of the band. As Stu Cook put it, **'I'm a jack-of-all trades and I don't care if I master any of them. Life is too short to worry about perfection.'**

Despite the tensions in the studio, the sessions produced some excellent material, such as the album opener *Pagan Baby* – a track born from a spontaneous jam in the studio that developed almost instantaneously as though the differences were not there after all. The album then shifts gear, the overall sound becoming funkier and soul driven. Disappointingly, the resulting recordings lost the immediacy of the band's previous work and only the tracks developed under almost live, off-the-cuff conditions really contained the quintessential Creedence touch. *Sailor's Lament*, for example seems overproduced with the band tied up in a choral harmony that smacks of needless indulgence. In spite of these weaknesses, *Pendulum* is a strong album when taken as a separate entity, and has stood up surprisingly well over the years. Unfortunately, it was at this point that the animosity and lack of influence within the group proved too much for Tom Fogerty, and he left Creedence shortly after *Pendulum*'s release in December 1970.

Pendulum was launched with all the razzmatazz of a Hollywood production at a lavish send off in the band's Berkeley offices, known as The Factory. Here, most of the world's rock media were treated to the album's first airing whilst being generously wined and dined. A TV special was made and shown, the band performed for the gathered rock media and the record played. Unfortunately the resulting coverage largely criticised the band's overblown and calculated efforts to curry favour with the critics, and it seemed that along with its founding member, Creedence has lost some of their integrity and soul.

Creedence went on to release one further album, *Mardi Gras*, with the remaining three members, but the release was lacklustre and the band's impending split was clear for all to see.

John Fogerty explained his view of the conflicts within the band and the events surrounding their ultimate separation in a 1997 edition of the Swedish magazine *Pop*: **'I was alone when I made that [Creedence] music. I was alone when I made the arrangements, I was alone when I added background vocals, guitars and some other stuff. I was alone when I produced and mixed the albums. The other guys showed up only for rehearsals and the days we made the actual recordings. For me Creedence was like sitting on a time bomb. We'd had decent successes with our cover of *Susie Q* and with the first album. When we went into the studio to cut *Proud Mary*, it was the first time we were in a real Hollywood studio, RCA Records' Los Angeles studio, and the problems started immediately. The other guys in the band insisted on writing songs for the new album; they had opinions on the arrangements and they wanted to sing. They went as far as adding background vocals to *Proud Mary* and it sounded awful. They used tambourines, and it sounded no better.**

'That's when I understood I had a choice to make. At that point in time we were just a one hit wonder, and *Susie Q* hadn't really been that big a hit. Either this [the new album] would be a success, something really big, or we might as well start working at the car wash again. There was a big row. We went to an Italian restaurant and I remember that I very clearly told the others that I for one didn't want to go back to the car wash again. Now we had to make the best possible album and it wasn't important who did what, as long as the result was the very best we could achieve. And of course I was the one who should do it. I don't think the others really understood what I meant, but at least I could manage the situation the way I wanted. The result was eight million-selling double-sided singles in a row and six albums, all of which went platinum. And *Melody Maker* had us as the best band in the world. That was after the Beatles split, but still… And I was the one who had created all this. Despite that, I don't think they understood what I was talking about… They were obsessed with the idea of more control and more influence. So finally the bomb exploded and we never worked together again.'

Creedence Clearwater Revival officially split in 1972, and the years have not thawed the frost between the band members, with Clifford and Cook categorically ruling out any chance of an official reunion with Jon Fogerty. The band may have ended on a sour note, but they leave behind an incredible legacy of hits, with their signature swamp rock sound keeping audiences chooglin' to this day.

Review

CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL

Green River

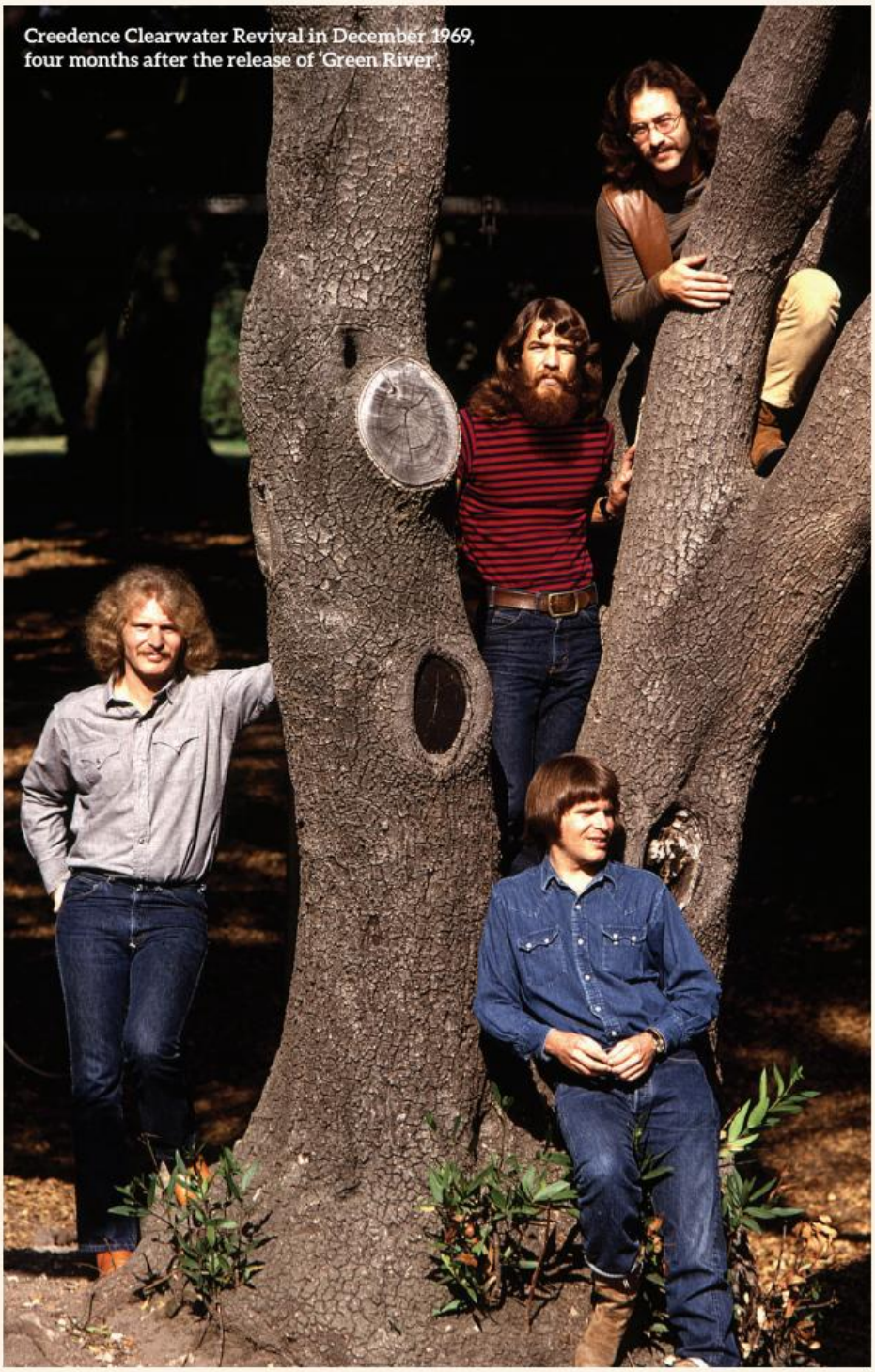
(50th Anniversary Vinyl Edition)

★★★★

Out 15 November on Craft Recordings.
craftrecordings.com

Track listing:

1. Green River
2. Commotion
3. Tombstone Shadow
4. Wrote a Song for Everyone
5. Bad Moon Rising
6. Lodi
7. Cross-Tie Walker
8. Sinister Purpose
9. The Night Time Is the Right Time



Creedence Clearwater Revival in December 1969, four months after the release of 'Green River'.

This is a half-speed master edition of the Creedence Clearwater Revival classic *Green River*.

Created by award-winning engineer Miles Showell at Abbey Road Studios, half-speed mastering is an exacting process that brings titles a new vibrancy. Using high-res transfers from the original analog tapes, the mastering process involves playing back the audio at half its recorded speed, while the cutting lathe is turned at half the desired playback speed. The technique allows more time to cut a micro-precise groove, resulting in more accuracy with frequency extremes and dynamic contrasts. The result on the turntables is an exceptional level of sonic clarity and punch, and it's great to hear such classic tunes as those on *Green River* in a fresh new way. As an LP, *Green River* was previously only available as part of the seven-LP *Studio Albums Collection* box set, so we love the ease of purchase here – good for filling a hole in an existing collection, or just to hear some classic tracks sounding brand new.

Green River has often been cited as frontman John Fogerty's favourite record from Creedence's catalog, and it's clear to see why! Featuring hit single *Green River* and, perhaps the definitive Creedence number, *Bad Moon Rising*. The album also features fan-favourite *Lodi*, *Wrote a Song for Everyone* and a cover of the R&B standard, *The Night Time Is the Right Time*. Included in the 2003 *Rolling Stone* feature *500 Greatest Albums of All Time* list, this was Creedence's first No. 1 record, and one that has remained a firm fan favourite.

The release comes housed in a handsome tip-on jacket, which mirrors the packaging of the original pressings, and would look smart on any record shelf. One star is deducted, as, despite the obvious quality of the remastered recordings, it would have been nice to include some previously unheard or rare material – one can never get enough Creedence. Overall this is a very worthy addition to any vinyl collection, and we look forward to future Craft releases.

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BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN – THE DARKNESS TOUR '78

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Released in the late spring of 1978, *Darkness On the Edge of Town* was the long awaited follow up to *Born to Run*. To celebrate the launch of the album, Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band undertook a major tour of North America that comprised of 115 performances. These limited edition releases feature carefully curated highlights from five of those legendary shows.

FEATURED TRACKS INCLUDE:

Badlands, **Adam Raised a Cain**, **Candy's Room**, **Racing In the Street**, **The Promised Land**, **Factory**, **Streets of Fire**, **Prove It All Night**, **Darkness On the Edge of Town**, **Rosalita**, **Born to Run**, **Summertime Blues**, **Thunder Road** and many more.

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THE DOORS

The landmark self-titled debut album

Few bands have travelled as deep into the darkest corners of life as the Doors, and few have managed to make it into such great rock 'n' roll. The Los Angeles based band were the dark shadow that hovered over the hippie utopia of the late sixties.

The Doors' funereal pop, marked by fairground keyboards, jazzy drumming and great guitar playing was topped by the brooding presence of Jim Morrison, one of rock's greatest ever front men. An erotic shamanic presence, Morrison managed to play the part of romantic poet, lizard king and Dionysian drunk all at the same time.

The Doors, it seemed, were the culmination of the sixties, one of the groups from that period that preached revolution and sounded like they meant it. With America in a state of turmoil during the Vietnam War, the band reflected the darkness at the core of the American psyche. Morrison's eloquent poetry and enigmatic presence was the perfect combination for the times, and his handsome features also managed to make him a bona fide pop star, a performer with far more substance than the usual offer of pouting teenyboppers that dominated the post-Beatles music market.

The sound and image of the Doors were amongst the most memorable ever in rock, and their body of work still sounds as striking today as when it was first recorded in the late sixties.

Morrison lived his life fast and loose, but he left behind an astounding catalogue of work and there are few precedents to the sound of the Doors. They seemed to burst out of a void and they left behind a powerful and influential legacy. Although there are countless acts that been inspired by the Doors, such as Joy Division, the Strokes, The Cure and Nirvana, perhaps the most important is the Stooges. Iggy Pop has since spoken about the role the Doors played in providing the inspiration to start his own group: **'… we saw that show and I just thought, well, this is so brazen, there is no excuse for us not to do it anymore.'**

It is widely regarded that the Stooges provided the proto-punk template for the punk movement, and that movement changed the face of music irrevocably in the late seventies, like no other has to this day. Proof that the influence of the Doors on the rock canon continues unabated, an impact they doubtless never imagined.

Despite their impressive legacy, all performers have to start somewhere and from a very young age it was clear that Jim Morrison was a gifted creative. In an interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine in 1969, the star recalled writing poetry as a child musing, **'… around the fifth or sixth grade I wrote a poem called *The Pony Express*. That was the first I can remember. It was one of those ballad type poems. I never could get it together, though. I always wanted to write, but I always figured it'd be no good unless somehow the hand just took the pen and started moving without me really having anything to do with it. Like, automatic writing. But it just never happened. I wrote a few poems, of course.**

The Doors in 1968. Left to right: John Densmore, Robby Krieger, Ray Manzarek and Jim Morrison.

'Like, *Horse Latitudes* I wrote when I was in high school. I kept a lot of notebooks through high school and college and then when I left school for some dumb reason – maybe it was wise – I threw them all away. There's nothing I can think of I'd rather have in my possession right now than those two or three lost notebooks. I was thinking of being hypnotized or taking sodium pentothal to try to remember, because I wrote in those books night after night. But maybe if I'd never thrown them away, I'd never have written anything original – because they were mainly accumulations of things that I'd read or heard, like quotes from books. I think if I'd never gotten rid of them I'd never been free.'

It was this passion for poetry and desire for creative freedom that drove Morrison and gave the Doors their edge. He strove for chaos and craved originality, something that drew keyboardist Ray Manzarek to him in the early days of their friendship. The two had met at the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television in 1965, and it was through Manzarek that they found the fellow musicians that eventually comprised the Doors. This was an incredibly fortuitous meeting for Morrison as although he is known as a great artist and performer, he has never actually been able to play an instrument and therefore wasn't necessarily a logical addition to any fledgling band.

> "I always wanted to write, but I always figured it'd be no good unless somehow the hand just took the pen and started moving without me really having anything to do with it. Like, automatic writing. But it just never happened."
>
> **Jim Morrison**

Regardless, Morrison's charisma and stage presence was undeniable, and by 1966 the iconic Doors line-up of Manzarek, Densmore, Krieger and Morrison was complete. The Doors soon began a residency at a little known bar on the Sunset Strip in LA called London Fog, where they cut their teeth and honed their craft before moving on to more salubrious establishments. Robby Krieger has since recalled the unglamorous surroundings of London Fog remembering, **'The stage was so fucking high, you needed an oxygen mask, I was worried about Jim falling. It had all these stupid, little circus ropes around the sides of the stage so you supposedly**

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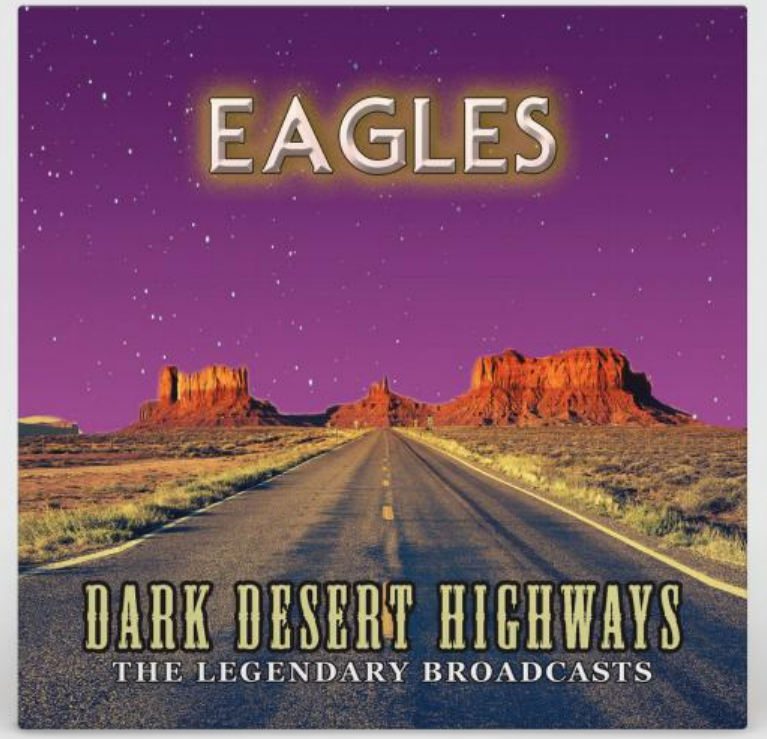

EAGLES – DARK DESERT HIGHWAYS

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This powerful six CD anthology brings together four of the very best live broadcasts by Eagles spanning the two decades from 1974–1994. Featured here are all the hits from this amazingly creative period when Eagles produced some of the most legendary music in the history of rock including *Desperado*, *Tequila Sunrise* and the immortal *Hotel California*.

FEATURED TRACKS INCLUDE:

Peaceful Easy Feeling, **Best of My Love**, **Tequila Sunrise**, **Help Me Thru the Night**, **The Heart of the Matter**, **Love Will Keep Us Alive**, **Learn to Be Still**, **Hotel California**, **Wasted Time**, **Lover's Moon**, **Pretty Maids All In a Row**, **The Girl from Yesterday**, **New York Minute**, **The Last Resort**, **Take It Easy**, **One of These Nights**, **In the City**, **Heartache Tonight**, **Get Over It**, **Desperado** and many more.

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A track-by-track analysis of the iconic album *The Doors*

Break On Through (To the Other Side)

Manzarek's distinctive bass line runs through this whole song, combining with Densmore's drums to give a distinctive groove and add an almost Latin flavour to the music. Morrison's husky baritone brims with danger, calling on the listener to break through to another level of consciousness. This timeless single has become synonymous with the swinging sixties and is a rock classic.

Soul Kitchen

Soul Kitchen drops the pace for a swampy workout, showcasing the Doors' casual ability to switch styles and moods. Morrison sings of late night ramblings in the neon-lit LA night. Fantastic lyrics conjure up a flicker of mystery – neon and minarets. The rest of the band creates a great atmospheric backdrop; with Manzarek's organ and Krieger's simple chops giving the song its distinctive flair.

Crystal Ship

This ballad is a master class in subtlety. Morrison's imagery is exquisite, and here he lets a gentle side of his personality show as he sings a song of ex-lover Mary Werbelow. Morrison slips into his neo-Sinatra baritone as he croons over the band's subtle backing, and Paul Rothschild's echo-drenched production provides the eldritch edge that is a hallmark of the Doors.

Twentieth Century Fox

Opening with a slinky guitar lick, the pace is back up here. The title is a pun on film corporation 20th Century Fox, and lyrically Morrison is on brilliant form. There is a great wonky guitar solo from Krieger over the band's stomping backbeat, and Manzarek shines, driving the song with one hand on the bass end of the keyboard and the other producing those distinctive chords.

Alabama Song (Whisky Bar)

This was originally written in the twenties by Bertolt Brecht, yet it perfectly suits the Doors disreputable vibe. The band made the song their own, making it sound like a drunken,

wouldn't fall. It was ridiculous. And across the way was a cage with Rhonda Layne, the go-go girl. She was slightly overweight and wore a miniskirt and go-go boots, doing the twist or the frug. She didn't know how to dance to *The End*, that's for sure. How do you do the frug to *The End*?' Adding that their audience was mostly comprised of 'sailors and perverts'.

The Doors demanding schedule at London Fog eventually gave rise to the offer of a job as the house band at famed LA club Whisky a Go Go. They gladly accepted and began working there in May 1966. By this point, much of the material that would form their debut album was coming together and the Doors were finessing their act, an act that quickly caught the eye of Jac Holzman – the then president of Elektra Records and the Doors' future producer Paul A. Rothchild. The Doors were signed to Elektra Records on 18 August 1966 (a career progression that came just in time) as Morrison's lewd and frequently bizarre behaviour earned the Doors a dismissal from Whisky a Go Go only three days later.

Jim Morrison (above) and John Densmore (opposite) during the Doors' appearence on Top of the Pops in September 1968.

Nonetheless, the Doors have always seemed to harbour fond memories of those early days, with Jim remarking, **'I just remember that some of the best musical trips we took were in clubs. There's nothing more fun than to play music to an audience. You can improvise at rehearsals, but it's kind of a dead atmosphere. There's no audience feedback. There's no tension, really, because in a club with a small audience you're free to do anything. You still feel obligated be good, so you can't get completely loose; there are people watching. So there is this beautiful tension. There's freedom and at the same time an obligation to play well. I can put in a full day's work, go home and take a shower, change clothes, then play two or three sets at the Whisky, man, and I love it. The way an athlete loves to run, to keep in shape.'**

The success of the Doors as a live act was mirrored by their impressive studio output, and their break in to the mainstream came in January 1967, with the eponymously titled debut album *The Doors*.

'I just remember that some of the best musical trips we took were in clubs. There's nothing more fun than to play music to an audience.' – Jim Morrison

delirious night sauntering out into LA's myriad mind-altering opportunities. Morrison was already fully immersed in the lifestyle, and this is reflected in their moody and atmospheric reimagining of the German original.

Light My Fire

Krieger wrote the majority of the lyrics here, yet Morrison delivers them with yearning and lust. Manzarek provides some utterly hypnotic keyboard that drips melody and atmosphere. Whilst Densmore lays down a deceptively simple drum beat. As the keyboard drops off Krieger comes in with a guitar solo so smooth it just drips out of the track in a psychedelic, almost-raga-like neo-drone.

Back Door Man

Ostensibly about an affair with a married woman (with the protagonist entering through the back door), the song could also be taken a lewd and rather crude double entendre. Morrison adds a bluesy feel to his grunts, groans and screams as he makes it his own. The Doors were experienced in the blues, originally playing a lot of blues covers in their club gigs.

I Looked At You

This sounds to be an almost throwaway track, a simple love song on the surface, yet it conceals something below. This was the true genius of the Doors – easily capable of flights of fantasy and brilliant ensemble playing, they could also make great neat pop songs that somehow still shackled all the power and dark danger of the band.

End of the Night

A dark, doleful piece about a journey into the unknown. The lyrics were inspired by the French novel *Journey to the End of the Night* by Ferdinand Céline, which quotes William Blake, 'Some are born to sweet delight. Some are born to endless night'. A great example of Morrison exploring his influences through rock music, pushing the form further than ever before.

Take It As It Comes

A great pop song, inspired by a lecture by the Maharishi (a teacher of transcendental meditation) that Jim Morrison attended. Some suggest that despite the song's reflective nature, it's actually stuffed with sexual metaphors – something you can never discount with the Doors. As always, there is a deeper layer hiding in the pop, and Ray Manzarek gives an entrancing organ solo inspired by the work of Bach.

The End

A sinister work, *The End* covers themes of murder, incest and fratricide. Beginning with a dark sitar-like guitar figure from Krieger; its power and presence are evident to this day. The length, loose, free-jazz dynamic and compelling echo-laden production makes this one of the most distinctive pieces of rock music ever recorded.

Newly signed to Elektra, the Doors entered the studio with producer Paul A. Rothschild and sound engineer Bruce Botnik in August 1966. Rothschild himself was not initially impressed with the band; his background had been in producing folk albums, and this bunch of unruly, long haired youths from LA playing heavy psychedelic underground rock was not exactly to his tastes. However, there was a certain something about them that caught his imagination and the feeling was mutual; Rothschild was freshly released from prison, and his jail sentence impressed the band, bolstering the producer's credibility no end. As Robby Krieger has stated, **'We didn't know about producers. We saw the name Paul Rothschild on a Paul Butterfield record. We loved that record. Plus the guy had just gotten out of jail so we figured he couldn't be all that bad.' The Doors respected their producer; he had the life experience and authenticity that the band venerated, and had also produced Love, an act the Doors greatly admired.**

If Rothschild's background in folk music provided him little or no experience with the new kind of song the Doors were creating, he didn't show it and *The Doors* proved to be the start of an excellent creative partnership between the two parties. The Doors themselves were a difficult group to work with and had no real template for the direction they were travelling in, but somehow the band and the producer combined perfectly to make one of the classic and era-defining albums of the sixties. The distinctive sound he achieved for the band was drenched in echo and darkness; perfect for their grand baroque vision. As Bruce Botnik put it, **'Paul had plenty of time in jail to think about techniques and styles. He dreamed about it. He put a lot of that to work. He developed a lot of techniques that are standard today.'** Work on *The Doors* was completed in less than one month, in August–September 1966, an efficiency that John Densmore attributed to the band's live experience: 'We had worked it up in the clubs so we just went in and did it.' This statement may not be entirely accurate though, as there were many well documented incidents of chaos during this short period. The most memorable of these occurrences came when Jim Morrison returned to the studio after recording had wrapped up for the day, and hosed down the band's recording area with a fire extinguisher

whilst tripping on LSD; leading to much of the band's equipment being replaced. Morrison denied any knowledge of the event, however the damning evidence of one of his shoes remained in the midst of the foam-drenched scene, like a modern Cinderella's slipper (if Cinderella was a leather clad rock star high on acid).

Aside from the behavioural problems, the Doors also faced some uncertainty when it came to their material. The dramatic Doors showstopper *The End* proved particularly hard to record, as it was difficult to capture the song's spontaneity. An eventual solution was found, though, by recording the song live with the band huddled together. Its unique and powerful dynamic was a testament not only to band's musical prowess, but also to the producer's experimental attitude in letting the group play as if they were onstage, an unheard-of indulgence in 1966.

The End wasn't the only track that proved to be problematic, and both the songs *Indian Summer*, which later went on to appear on *Morrison Hotel*, and the Doors' classic *Moonlight Drive* were cut completely from the debut album. Heralded as the first proper Doors recording, *Moonlight Drive* was also the song that sparked the band's creative union when Jim performed it for Ray Manzarek back in 1965, and would have seemed to be the logical album opener. In 2016, Robbie Krieger related the creative difficulties surrounding the recording of the song to *People* magazine recalling, **'When we went to record the first album, the first one we did was *Moonlight Drive*. It just sounded too mysterious and kind of dark. So we**

Jim Morrison and guitarist Robby Krieger onstage in 1969.
'In the Doors we have both musicians and poets, and both know of each other's art, so we can effect a synthesis.' – Robby Krieger

rearranged it for the second album and made it a little more wild.'

From that description it sounds as if *Moonlight Drive* would in fact have been a perfect fit for *The Doors*, an album drenched in a deep, dark, sonorous echo, that perfectly showcases the two sides of the band. One side was capable of writing great, sweeping pop music, and the other created the dark and dangerous musical trips. It's one of those rare debut albums that arrived fully formed – as perfect a debut album as ever released in rock. Speaking of the album's success, Ray Manzarek has since commented that *The Doors* was the sound of **'four incredibly hungry young men, striving and dying to make it, desperately wanting to get a record, a good record, out to the American public – and wanting them to like it.'**

Although, Manzarek's comment refers to the classic Doors line-up, there were in fact five 'hungry young men' featured on *The Doors*, as session bassist Larry Knechtel was brought in to beef up the sound of Ray Manzarek's keyboard bass. Ultimately Knechtel was not credited with his performance on the album as he simply provided overdubs, though some have felt that this is slightly unfair in hindsight. The Doors actually used a 'ghost bassist' in a similar fashion on all their subsequent releases, featuring bass players such as Harvey Brooks and Doug Lubahn; it has even been reported that Lubahn was invited to join the Doors at one point but turned down the offer.

Input from outsiders notwithstanding, the album was quintessentially the Doors. Bristling with ideas and imagination, it had the raw edge of a young band full of imagination, yet the playing was impeccable and showcased a band that had earned their chops. The record had a startlingly original atmosphere; a darkness that had never been heard before, and yet a commercial touch that made the songs infinitely listenable and propelled them on to the airwaves.

The commercial appeal of the Doors sound was bolstered no end by the addition of Jim Morrison as frontman, the perfect face for the band's moody and haunting music. Morrison was a frontman who was not only eloquent and intelligent, but who also oozed a danger at which the previous bête noir of rock, Mick Jagger, could only hint. The smouldering Morrison combined louche sex appeal with a dark, intellectual rigour and danger. This was a new kind of rock god, and one that America bizarrely embraced with open arms.

The Doors marked the beginning of a meteoric rise to stardom for the band, and they were quickly topping the charts with hits such as *Light My Fire* and performing on the hugely popular *Ed Sullivan Show*, long a stalwart of commercial successes such as Elvis Presley and the Beatles, and a sure route to superstardom in the US. By their second album the Doors were riding high, yet enjoyed their success for only a brief time. Sadly, as we know the end came only too soon, and in the most tragic manner, with the death of Jim Morrison on 3 July 1971. Despite the catastrophe that befell the band, they remain one of the most influential and iconic groups to this day, and the ripples of their music legacy will be felt throughout generations to come. Long live the Lizard King!

BLACK SABBATH

In Their Own Words

As one of the greatest bands in rock history and undoubtedly the pioneers of heavy metal, Black Sabbath's unique sound and far reaching influence has changed the face of music forever. Here, we listen to the band themselves, as they detail their personal journeys as part of the rock behemoth with journalist Steven Rosen.

Ozzy Osbourne

Birmingham was home to a lot of music in the sixties – The Move, the Moody Blues, Traffic, Robert Plant, John Bonham and a handful of lesser-known artists who would finally come together as Black Sabbath.

John Michael Osbourne – born 3 December 1948, Anthony Frank Iommi – born 19 February 1948, and Terence Michael Butler – born 17 July 1949, grew up within spitting distance of each other and it didn't take long for them to become acquainted. Unbeknown to William Thomas Ward – born 5 May 1948, was the fact that within a few miles of his own home were three other musicians each searching desperately for the missing pieces that would ultimately make them whole. All four musicians had been involved in a series of bands (Bill even played 'legit' standards in his school orchestra) but it wasn't until Ward and Iommi started an ensemble called Mythology, and Ozzy and Geezer teamed up in Rare Breed that the first real seeds of Black Sabbath were planted. Mythology was little more than a blues band, covering classics, but generally blending in as just another one of the faceless entities Birmingham now seemed to be giving some attention to.

After changing their name to The Rest, Mythology ran its course, leaving Iommi and Ward to reignite their search for other players.

In need of another singer and bassist, they found an ad in a local music paper. 'Ozzy Zig – vocalist, requires band. Owns own P.A.' Tony had attended school with an 'Ozzy' but he felt certain this could not be the same individual. Not only did he not get along with this person, this particular schoolmate couldn't sing a note. All the same they decided to give it a chance and respond to the advert.

Bill Ward recalls: **'He had no hair [cut short], which kind of turned me off straight away because I had hair down to my backside. So he said, "Oh, I'll grow my hair out." He was looking for work, he was wanting to be singing in a band. And then I think he called himself Ozzy Zig. You know, for whatever reason. It was a really stupid advertisement. And I could remember at the time, Tony having some dread when we were arriving at the house because Tony went to school with Ozzy. So they'd known each other since they were eleven and Tony went, "I hope this isn't the Ozzy that I think it is." And it was, and we were going, "Oh, no, we might as well just walk away from this straight away." Because Tony was kind of pretty handy back then; we were very rough around the edges so I didn't know if a fight was going to break out or not.'**

'Black Sabbath wasn't like the Bon Jovis of the time. We were just a bunch of guys that were against the grain of society. And we sung about things that people thought back then.'
– Ozzy Osbourne

They started jamming together, very casually, first as the Polka Tulk Blues Band (a name taken from a local Pakistani clothing store), then as Polka Tulk and finally as Earth.

'We used to jam together and play a few gigs together and we wrote original music and it worked. I had gone to school with Tony and I was working in a semi-professional group [Rare Breed] with Geezer. Then we all formed and met, and we chose Black Sabbath as a name. We didn't plan it and expect it to make such a profit as it did. It's just one of those great things in life. We tried to put music over in a different angle. It had an evil sound, a heavy doom sound. And then there were all these witches and freaks phoning us, wanting us to play at black masses and all this crap.'

In December 1969, the band signed to Philips Records subsidiary Fontana and released *Evil Woman (Don't Play Your Games With Me)* the following month. Then came their eponymous album, which made it to No. 8 in the British charts. Black Sabbath next recorded *Paranoid* and *Master of Reality* and began to really see the rewards of success; rented estates in Beverly Hills, big album budgets and a serious supply of drugs.

At this time Osbourne had grown so unhealthily consumed by the lifestyle, that he even entertained the idea of quitting the business entirely. Years later when his own solo career was well established, each tour was said to be, definitely and without question, his last. One outing was dubbed the Retirement Sucks Tour – a nod to the world-weary attitude of the frontman and the toll the machinations of the music industry had taken on his enthusiasm for performing.

Master of Reality was followed by *Vol. 4* and then *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*, the album that swapped the analog hands of tape operators, that Black Sabbath had always favoured, for the digital readouts of synthesizers.

'*Master of Reality* was the turning point. That was the last real Sabbath album as far as I'm concerned… And then we started to progress into *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* where we started to get mechanical in the studio, use synthesizers, and then sort of over-tracking and double-tracking and triple-tracking and backward cymbals and standing in the bathroom with a bag of coal in your mouth. I call it the "investigation period", that was.

'For instance, the first albums were the quickest albums, and they were the biggest selling albums of Sabbath. The later albums took forever to record and they didn't sell anywhere near that. There's something in that, you know? If you've got a tune and it's lively, if you work on it, it's like you have a record player and you hear the same song every minute of the day for like three months. And you'll hate it. You'll think, "Jesus Christ". At one time, every song on the radio sounded like the Eagles, and it's at a turning point where I think everybody just sort of got Eagle-itis. It's like you know, overkill.

'That was the last album we used Rodger Bain for. Then we used Patrick Meehan on *Vol. 4*. But we really didn't have much to do with the production of those records anyway. Not at all. I'd be a liar if I said so. All we did was just put these cute little effects on, you pushed the buttons, and we played the music, you know? The production is one side of it but if the music is strong enough on its own anyway, it's got the vibe, it'll go anyway. All you've gotta do is get an equal balance.'

Balance is exactly what the quartet maintained during this period. There was a sharing of power, powders and passions. Ozzy, from the time he was Mr. Zig, had a unique vision of what he wanted and Black Sabbath was his golden ticket into a world that would allow him to fulfil those dreams. Though he's always been quick to dismiss hard work as a dirty word – or two dirty words.

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'Professional? No way. Forget it. [That was] the first lunacy that I was ever involved in. It had its moments, but Sabbath became like a dinosaur, it got too big to survive. We wouldn't come down to their terms, we thought we were too good to do anything, like Zeppelin and Pink Floyd had reached that niche where they could record, and not go out on the road because they were like the invisible band. But when they came out, it was like "Phew!" Like God had arrived. Sabbath was kind of blinded by the fact that they thought they should have been there but we never quite got there because we weren't prepared to put the hours in that the other people did. Zeppelin went on the road for three years before they could even bother to do that or even afford to do that, whereas Sabbath went on the road for a six-week tour, on, then three weeks off. We'd stop here or there, take a break. We were the biggest hypochondriacs you'd ever met in your life. We must have spent most of our earnings on doctors' fees. It was like, "I've got a pain. Go to bed for three days." It's just indigestion from eating too much Chinese food from the night before. Or, "I've got cancer." "Sure you have." We always said, "If I die, bury me in England."

'Bill Ward used to have a bag so full [of medicines]. I mean, it got to the point that we went on the road one time and he even had a snakebite kit. I said, "Where the hell are you ever going to see a snake? Where on this Earth are you ever going to see one? Or are you going to drive to a zoo or something?" He says, "You never know, some of these snakes run pretty fast when you're driving across the desert." [Ozzy breaks into laughter]. On a 650 motorbike, in the bloody Colorado Desert? I mean if the snake ever bit him, the snake doesn't have a bloody chance.

'We used to call him "Dr. Bill" and "Valiums Forever". If you had anything wrong with you, you'd just go and see Bill. He had things for everything. When he came up with that snakebite kit, it was like the ultimate. I mean I'd never seen one of those things; he had a big old razor like your dad might have, and I said, "What if it bites you up the ass, Bill?" He said, "Somebody's going to have to suck the poison out." [More laughter] I said, "Don't come to me, man. Find a new friend to help you."'

Multiple tours into the band's career, Ozzy still harbours some fond memories of this period. In fact, his first trip to America in 1970 is a time that he affectionately recalls as a defining moment in Black Sabbath's career.

'I suppose, when we first got to play the big arenas, it was like we went from one tour, played two nights at the Whisky [Whisky a Go Go, a small but famous LA club] and then from the Whisky we went to The Forum [a huge 17,000-seat facility]. But I hated playing the Forum; we hated it. It's a weird sound when you're playing on stage there.'

Though Ozzy still feels a warm appreciation for the group's early albums (whilst sometimes tramples underfoot the progress made on subsequent albums), he has conceded that he enjoys the performance he gave on *Sabotage*, and to some extent, on the *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* record as well.

'I think the music is definitely going in a better direction. When you set out to record and write an album, you never sit down and say, "Well, this is going to go this way." I think this last album is the best one we've ever done. I think it shocked a lot of people. It shocked me. As far as the strings and the bagpipes are concerned, we just tried it. We tried anything and

The original Black Sabbath line-up in 1969.
From left to right: Tony Iommi, Ozzy Osbourne, Geezer Butler and Bill Ward.

everything. If it's good, it's good. Try anything once because it's your record.'

Trying everything was another way in which Black Sabbath managed to keep their egos on an even keel. Not surprisingly, it turned out that Ozzy leaned towards the very heavy material. Tony, believe it or not, was partial to the mellower sounds and Geezer shifted towards the heavy songs but with a touch of sweetness, whilst Bill opted for the desolate, more atmospheric sounding material.

'Tony likes mellow stuff, Geezer likes heavy but mellow combined, and Bill writes lonely stuff, very sort of sad stuff. I went to Tony's house one day and he'd done this thing on a piano and a Mellotron. It sounded like a bloody symphony. He's always piddling about in the band with a synthesizer. I believe this was *Vol. 4*. That was like the beginning of a new trip for us. *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* was stage two. On *Vol. 4*, we opened eyes to what we can eventually do. It's like opening another door.'

One of these doors was undoubtedly opened when the band changed management from Patrick Meehan to Don Arden, the father of Sharon Osbourne – Ozzy's later wife and manager. They also switched labels, moving from Vertigo to NEMS Records in the UK, while remaining on Warner Bros. in America. In April 1974, Black Sabbath performed at the California Jam in Ontario, California, a multi-day affair capped off by the appearances of Emerson, Lake & Palmer, Deep Purple and, of course, Black Sabbath. With the exception of Ozzy, the band was reluctant to appear, a hesitance that reflected the cracks beginning to show in the strained group's mentality. After a strong argument in favour of the appearance from Ozzy, Sabbath rehearsed and turned in a very strong showing, but by this time the seeds of discontent were sprouting and it soon became apparent that the band was on its last legs. As Ozzy put it, **'Everyone was trying to fight everybody else, 'cause everyone didn't want to own up to themselves and say, "It's over."'** Ozzy decided to forge a path alone, a seeming betrayal that angered his fellow Sabbath band members. The animosity was mutual, as Ozzy, for his part, felt the name Black Sabbath should have been shelved when he left the band, leaving his band mates to continue under a new designation. Unsurprisingly the record company disagreed, and in order to try and postpone the inevitable, released the *We Sold Our Soul for Rock 'n' Roll* compilation album in 1976. This seventy-minute-plus album contained *Paranoid*, *Iron Man*, *Black Sabbath*, *N.I.B.* and a dozen other staples, and was a popular release, placating the record executives and buying the remaining Sabbath members some time to work on new material.

The new material that followed was the album *Technical Ecstasy* and whilst it wasn't a terrible record, it was really little more than a reflection of the bold, brazen and bone-breaking sounds the group had immortalised on earlier recordings.

'The last Sabbath albums were very depressing for me. It was doing it for the sake of what we could get off the record company and just get fat on beer and put a record out. Nobody was really interested in promoting it. No one was interested in getting out there and working on the road. *Never Say Die* was my last album with Sabbath. I didn't finish it, either. I just did that last record and said, "Okay", and walked out, 'cause I couldn't stand it any more. In fact, *Goodbye to Romance*, on my first solo album [*Blizzard of Ozz* – 1981], was just about farewell to the past, farewell to Black Sabbath.'

Tony Iommi

Black Sabbath guitarist Tony Iommi stands well over six feet tall, an imposing figure. He plays as if he had six fingers. Which isn't bad, since several years ago the left-handed player hacked off the ends of two of them – the middle and ring fingers of his right hand. Consequently, he has had to completely alter his playing, struggling with various types of plastic tips – thimble-like coverings, which he places on the ball-ends of his fingers. Despite this almost impossible handicap, he has managed to turn this disability into a positive thing and has gone on to become one of the most distinctive, and copied, players in today's rock scene.

Tony Iommi onstage in 1972.

'There's only one Sabbath guitarist and he is the architect for everything, Tony Iommi.' – Zakk Wylde

Growing up Iommi's first musical aspiration was to play the drums, but when he realised he couldn't afford the kit – and that playing the accordion just wasn't what he wanted – he fell in love with the guitar. **'I got a guitar for a birthday present and things just went on from there. I got a better guitar and then an even better one.'**

In 1969, whilst still performing with Sabbath under the moniker Earth, Iommi auditioned for Jethro Tull and scored the lead guitarist slot. This was during Mick Abrahams' departure and just before the group's appearance in the Rolling Stones' *Rock 'n' Roll Circus*. Tony was featured in the filming of the project, miming Mick's guitar lines from *A Song for Jeffrey*, but left immediately afterwards.

'It just wasn't right. At first, I thought the band was great, but I didn't much go for having a leader in the band which was Ian Anderson's way. Not only that, the communication between the band members wasn't too friendly. In Black Sabbath, there's no leader – everyone does their own part.'

He swiftly returned to his former band mates and acquired a Fender Stratocaster that he plugged into two Marshall 4x12 cabinets powered by two 50-watt tops. As the band grew in popularity, they changed from Earth to Black Sabbath, and adopted a more theatrical, black magic-inspired theme, expanding the music in intensity and volume.

After using the Stratocaster for several years, he changed to Gibson and now uses only SGs. His current choice raises the strings to a higher profile than usual, but it has brought the open strings and twelfth-fret octaves into almost perfect sympathy. The bridge's height also prevents the lightweight strings he uses from constantly rattling against the fretboard: **'It's sort of an experimental guitar. Everything that can be done to a guitar has been done to this one. That's probably why I like it because I've got it exactly as I want it, apart from still having trouble with tuning.'**

The change from Fender to Gibson came one night when the band was playing in Germany and one of the pickups went out on Tony's Stratocaster. Grudgingly, he snatched the Gibson that he kept on stage for such emergencies, and since that time has never returned to a Fender. The Gibson neck and fretboard appealed to him because of the ease with which he could bend notes.

All of Tony's guitars had to be modified to accommodate his left-handedness. He now realises that when he first started, he could have probably just turned a right-hand guitar around and played it upside down (à la Jimi Hendrix). But he didn't, and now he's forced to buy a left-handed guitar or alter instruments to fit his needs. To add to his southpaw problem, he must also contend with the digital amputation he suffered years ago.

'I can't use right-handed instruments now because I snipped the ends of my fingers off and on a Les Paul you've got to get right up to the end of the guitar on a reversed right-handed instrument to hit the strings. Not many people know about the accident. It happened years ago when I was doing electric welding. One day I had to

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cut this sheet metal before I welded. Somebody else used to do it but I had to do it this day because he didn't come into work. It was a faulty switch or something: Thhhhttt! I pulled it out and it just gripped the ends and pulled them off.'

As fate would have it, the day of the accident was Tony's last day on the job before he was to have departed for Germany with a rock outfit. Feeling completely lost, he decided to give up the guitar. One day, much later, a friend brought him a Django Reinhardt record and after hearing what the brilliant gypsy player was able to create with just two fingers (the fourth and fifth fingers of his left hand were permanently damaged in a fire), Tony felt rejuvenated and slowly began practising.

'I had to start all over again which was kind of a drag… I'd get annoyed and pick the guitar up and smash it. At first people didn't realise how hard it was to learn to play like that. It involved a lot of determination and a lot of hard work and practice. It's just something I'll have to try and overcome. The accident happened over eight years ago, way before Sabbath or Tull. And when I joined Jethro they even said, "What are those things on your fingers?" When I told them, they were quite surprised to find I could play guitar with these. I've had to adopt a totally different way of playing because of these fingers. I mean, it's much easier when the flesh is there as it should be. Instead of, say, pulling a note, I have to sort of push it up to get a vibrato. These tips are a bit clumsy and they slow me down and get in the way. I even have to wear leather on them to grip the strings.'

Tony has also had to search for strings that wouldn't clink or buzz when pushed with his new synthetic fingertips. By combining Ernie Ball light-gauge strings for the first and second, and Piccato light-gauge for the remaining four, he's found a set that is comfortable for both his heavy chording and solo playing. Strings are changed twice a week and never right before a performance; he feels that leaving them on any longer causes the strings to wear out over the frets and makes them virtually impossible to tune.

'That's one of the reasons why I don't like using thick-gauge strings because when I bend the strings it'll rip my bloody fingers apart. On acoustics, I like lightweight gauge strings as well, because I can get a nice sound from them.'

Geezer Butler

Terry 'Geezer' Butler, as one half of the rhythm section of Birmingham's Black Sabbath, is an unsung hero. Largely overlooked when you think of Ozzy and the riffman himself, Tony Iommi, it was Butler's very frantic fingers that filled in the holes of this heavy metal trio's music. And what many fans don't even realise is that this is the man who wrote all the lyrics, all that dark marching evil army stuff, the words to *Paranoid*, *Iron Man* and *War Pigs*.

In Sabbath, most of the lyrics were yours?
About 95%; Ozzy came up with the melody lines, the vocal lines, for instance *Iron Man*, he came up with the line 'iron man' so I wrote the lyrics around that subject. He used to be good at coming up with like one line that would give you the inspiration to write the rest of the song.

You do compose on bass?
Most of the time, or guitar; I'm not brilliant at guitar so when I'm playing guitar, it sounds like bass anyway. It's all riffs, I can really only write riffs.

Do you think Sabbath influenced other bands and the music they're now playing?
Yes, everything, the whole style of the music, the lyrical content, just the heaviness of it, the riffs, and the way the bass and guitar play together. But I like the bands that have taken the essence of it and are doing their own thing. A lot of the better bands have done that; the ones that just totally, blatantly ripped Sabbath off don't really – it's a nice compliment

Black Sabbath in 1970. Undoubtedly the pioneers of heavy metal, Sabbath's unique sound and far reaching influence has changed the face of music forever.

but they should move on from there. We did that twenty years ago.

I like bands like Metallica, Pantera and Machine Head. You can see the influences but they've done it in a totally different way.

How long did it take to do the first Sabbath record?

Two days but we'd had eighteen months in which to write and play together. For this, it was almost totally live; just a couple of guitar overdubs, no effects on the bass, all the drum tracks were done in two days including getting the sounds.

What type of gear did you used to use with Sabbath?

Anything free [laughs]. Ampeg but then they went out of business so I switched to Crown power amps and Alembic pre-amp or Marshall pre-amp. Laney was what I started out very first using but then as the band got bigger and bigger, the Laney stuff was too unreliable so I switched to Ampeg in around 1971.

You would have liked to have seen the name retired that last time you played with Sabbath?

It should have been retired when Ozzy left, but I think after the second version with Ronnie Dio, when that split up, that should have been it then, put it to rest once and for all.

So there was never really any bad blood between you and Ozzy towards the end?

It's off and on between me and him; we have massive fights and don't speak to each other for two years. I've probably said at least three times, 'I'll never ever play with Ozzy again in me life' and then time goes by and we start talking and get together again. It's just one of those sorts of relationships. Weird.

Do you feel any sense of the world of music being as creative and open now as it was when you first started with Sabbath?

No, it can't possibly be because there are so many bands now and the record companies, as soon as one thing becomes popular, that's all they'll sign. This so-called punk thing that's been going on, you hear Green Day, and you hear ten Green Days for the next two years. In the old days, you'd only have one Emerson, Lake & Palmer, or one Yes, or Sabbath, or one Deep Purple; you wouldn't get all these millions of everybody copying the same thing. It's a shame because there are a lot of really great bands there that are getting passed by.

When people look back at you and your body of work, what would you like them to come away with?

I don't know: you'd have to ask them. It's really hard for me to look at myself like that!

With over seventy million records sold, and a sound so original that it reshaped the entire music scene, Black Sabbath are undoubtedly one of the most important rock bands ever. And with a potential Sabbath reunion on the horizon in 2022, it seems this is one band that will never say die.

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ROD STEWART

The Faces Years

Today he is one of the biggest and most recognisable stars in rock, a leather-lunged powerhouse that shot to stardom in the early seventies and has stayed there into *his* early seventies. Here, we look at Rod Stewart's time in the Faces, the band that helped launch him to superstardom.

On 1 November 1969, the Faces, consisting of Ronnie Lane, Ian McLagan, Kenney Jones, Ronnie Wood and Rod Stewart, launched their new career.

Just a few weeks later, Rod's first solo album was released, which had largely been recorded during his time with Jeff Beck. Entitled *An Old Raincoat Won't Ever Let You Down*, it also included contributions by Wood and McLagan. The record sold better in the States, where it was called simply *The Rod Stewart Album*, and consisted of several self-written songs along with covers of the Stones' *Street Fighting Man* and Mike D'Arbo's *Handbags and Gladrags*. Played now, more than thirty years later, it is easy to see the undeniable potential, the talent developing and the larger than life reputation waiting to take off. The fact that the album came out just as Rod was joining the Faces seems to somehow foreshadow the band ultimately ending with Rod finally stepping off into a hugely successful solo career. Its very release seems to underline just why the other Small Faces had been initially guarded about including a clearly talented star-in-waiting. On the other hand, Rod had never made a secret of the fact that he wanted a solo career and had actively been pursuing one, albeit unsuccessfully, since the mid-sixties. The Small Faces had already been left without a frontman once before when Steve Marriott left the band following months of disagreements to form 'supergroup' Humble Pie with Pete Frampton, so their trepidation when taking on Rod Stewart is certainly understandable. The Faces had come away from a seemingly disastrous contract as the Small Faces, finding that they had hardly earned any money despite huge chart successes throughout the sixties. Seeing the opportunity to finally put that behind them, take their new band out and to make it commercially viable was obviously attractive to the group, and the last thing they wanted was for Rod Stewart to leave them for his solo work. As time told, this was exactly what did happen, and eventually, each member went on to various degrees of post-Faces musical success, although most of them never achieved even a fraction of the fortune that came their old singer's way. Ronnie Lane leaving the Faces started a chain of events that culminated in his tragically premature death. Ian McLagan would go on to play with just about anyone who was anyone on the rock scene, appearing with acts such as Bob Dylan and Bonnie Raitt. Kenney Jones replaced Keith Moon on The Who's drum stool and Ron Wood became a member of the Rolling Stones.

Going solo when he did proved a wise decision on Rod Stewart's part, as he has

The Faces onstage in 1971.
Left to right: Ronnie Wood, Rod Stewart and Ronnie Lane.

gone on to become one of rock's biggest stars. The Faces, of course, gave him that first big chance, whether he realised it at the time or not. Rod's creative output saturated the charts within months of joining the Faces, and the record-buying public were hard put to figure out what was a Faces record and what was a Rod Stewart release. To confuse matters even more, the latter would often include contributions from his Faces colleagues who were presumably only too pleased to find themselves on another hot-selling record. What proved to be a step too far, however, was when the Faces members found themselves being described as Rod Stewart and the Faces.

Quite simply, for members of one of the most popular bands of recent times to become merely a backing band for their newly added singer was too much to ignore. In fairness, Rod has stated that he felt embarrassed by that development too, and that it unfortunately affected his friendship with some of the Faces that only time has really healed.

Stewart elaborated on these difficulties in an interview with *Sounds* magazine in 1973: **'I reckon I've done my fair share for the band. I don't mean the band's breaking up. I just mean I want to think a bit more for myself. I don't think I could ask for more as far as my status as an artist goes. It's simply that well here's an example: I was asked to do a TV programme, one of those chat shows, and I didn't do it because I didn't want to upset the band by looking like the "leader of the group" type of thing. Well, now I'm not going to worry. The band understand. It's not detrimental to them. It's just that there's a different feeling now and we all want to come out as people as well as musicians.'**

> "One of Britain's greatest contributors to Rock 'n' Roll, the Faces' brand of pub swagger had the right combination of grit, charm, mischief, soul, style and wicked sense of humour, to make them one of the most iconic bands of all time."
>
> SLASH

Even at this early point in the band's career, it was clear that the lifespan of the Faces was destined to be short. Despite this, they became, for a brief shining time, the ultimate lads' rock 'n' roll band, commanding a huge following and creating a riot wherever they played.

It must have been a very strange experience for the three remaining Small Faces when they walked into the new Warner Brothers London office; that very room had once housed Immediate Records and had been the scene of the fateful signing of Small Faces to their label. This time they emerged with some cash, an event that was almost a novelty to McLagan, Jones and Ronnie Lane, and soon after, in December 1969, they set to work cutting the first Faces album in the DeLane Lea Studio in Soho, London. Released in March 1970, *First Step* is just what it says on the cover – a band finding their feet and direction, whilst having more than a bit of fun along the way. In true Small

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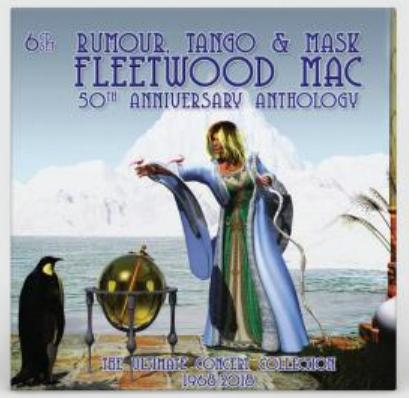

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The Faces during a performance in Los Angeles in October 1973.

Faces tradition, the album included two instrumental numbers amongst a track list that opened with *Wicked Messenger* – a Bob Dylan cover, and moved through the soulful *Devotion*, to the excellent *Stone. Around the Plynth*, a track that dated back to Ron and Rod's time with Jeff Beck, has some superb slide guitar that is reminiscent of what Led Zeppelin achieved on *Led Zeppelin III*. The instrumental *Pineapple and the Monkey* showcases McLagan on Hammond keys, whilst the wonderful numbers *Nobody Knows* and *Three Button Hand Me Down* show just why Rod Stewart had been so keen to join up with the group. The album's highlight could be considered to be the stunning *Flying*, which despite its obvious strength, failed to chart when released as a single. The album itself did a little better; climbing to No. 45 in the UK album charts, but was less successful in the US. As the album slowly made itself known, Rod went back into the studios to record his follow up solo album *Gasoline Alley*. He was also busy on the road with the Faces, playing primarily to small audiences up and down the country as they carried on developing their sound and their reputation as the biggest party around. Quite often they would arrive at a venue to find themselves being touted as the Small Faces, the result of which saw audiences calling out for the old band's better-known hits. Despite this pressure, the band held firm and only played their new set, which they took to Toronto, in March 1970, when they appeared with the ultimate boogie band, Canned Heat, before travelling south for a US tour. The tour was a rousing success and helped to establish a Faces following in the States that Rod Stewart would ultimately tap in to very effectively. Back in the UK, the Faces were once again playing more modest surroundings as the British public proved slow to warm to their new line-up.

Gasoline Alley was released in September 1970, and went on to outsell *First Step*, reaching No. 27 in the UK album charts. Despite being packaged as a solo Rod Stewart album, it contained substantial contributions from Faces members, such as the album opener – a mandolin-soaked title track rich with Ronnie Wood's influence that somehow perfectly captures this period in the Faces/Stewart history. Next, a lengthy cover of the Womack's *It's All Over Now* (a song that had already helped catapult the Stones in to superstardom) gives way to a beautiful version of Bob Dylan's *Only a Hobo*. This track inspired the cover shot of a lone man slumped against a wall in the eponymous 'Gasoline Alley'. *My Way of Giving*, a track left over from a Small Faces session a few years earlier, is the Small Faces at their finest: with McLagan's distinctive Hammond, haunting Ronnie Lane backing vocals and excellent lead vocals. Two cover versions follow, the first, Elton John's *Country Comfort*, then the superb Eddie Cochran number, *Cut Across Shorty* – a track that became a Faces live favourite as the lines between Rod's solo work and the Faces began to blur. *Lady Day* and *Jo's Lament* return the listener to original Rod Stewart material with Ron Wood featuring prominently again, adding the quality that would soon see him being asked to join the Rolling Stones. *You're My Girl (I Don't Want to Discuss It)* ends a fine set of mainly melancholy songs with a full-on Faces presence that blurred the lines between Rod Stewart's career and that of the Faces even further. This position became increasingly more confusing over the next few years, however Rod has always been upfront about his desire for personal success. As he noted in conversation with *Sounds* magazine in 1973: **'There were three things I started out to do when the band formed. One was to make the band successful because rarely do you get a second chance to be at the top and I didn't think the Faces were going to get it in this country – but they have. I also wanted to make Woody a star and I think I've done that as well. He could be bigger, but he's well known in**

his own right now as a guitar player. And the third thing was to sell my own albums, which I've done.'

The Faces followed the release of *First Step* with a US tour alongside blues band Savoy Brown. The Faces' popularity was gaining momentum and the venues grew steadily more impressive. So much so, that by the end of the tour they wrapped up with an appearance at the Los Angeles Forum in front of twenty thousand enthusiastic fans. Through September 1970–January 1971, the Faces took over the Morgan Sound Studio in London and completed their second album, simply titled *Long Player*.

Released in a stitched retro sleeve, *Long Player* saw all the essential Faces elements come together with, of course, Rod Stewart front and centre. The album opens with the quintessential Faces track *Bad 'n' Ruin*. Penned by Rod and McLagan, it fully captures the whole exhausting party spirit of the band. The strength of chemistry here is just extraordinary – this was a band having a lifetime's worth of fun and wanting to pass it on to the listener. The public lapped it up and revelled in the stories of drunkenness and debauchery that gave the Faces their roguish, bawdy charm. The Faces follow this upbeat number by taking a collective foot off the gas to deliver Ronnie Lane's haunting and devastatingly sad *Tell Everyone*, delivered soulfully by Rod. This track that acts as a strong reminder as to exactly why Ronnie Lane is often considered a criminally underrated writer. This isn't his only offering on this album, and Lane's influence can also be heard on the co-written *Sweet Lady Mary*, *Had Me a Real Good Time*, *On the Beach*, and above all, on his own *Richmond* which remains an absolute must on any Faces compilation. *Maybe I'm Amazed* follows: a live recording of a Paul McCartney track, before the Faces kick it up a notch for *Had Me a Real Good Time*. Rod, Ron and Ronnie wrote the rousing track, and it once again sums up the world according to the Faces, perfectly capturing their world of booze, women and parties. This was a band that truly lived the rock 'n' roll dream. Gigs often turned in to parties when huge sections of the audience followed the band back to bars and hotels creating havoc as they did so. Never ones to worry about the effects of boozing before appearing onstage, the band would often be literally falling all over the place by the time they got to performing. It created a hugely enjoyable, exciting and unpredictable roughness

that was also incredibly endearing. *Long Player* continues with *On the Beach* – a track that is more Stones than the Stones themselves, before moving in to a live version of the Big Bill Broonzy track *I Feel So Good*. The live recording is taken from a 1970 concert at the Fillmore East in New York, and opens with an incredible performance by Ian McLagan. *Jerusalem* followed – a stunning slide rendition of the classic hymn by Ron Wood, which closes the album and became an unexpected hit. *Long Player* outsold the Faces debut album, hovering around the No. 30 mark in the charts on both sides of the Atlantic, and it was clear that the Faces were on the rise.

With this steady progress under their collective belts, the Faces took off for another tour of the States in the summer of 1971. This tour coincided with the release of Rod's next solo album, *Every Picture Tells a Story*, which featured both McLagan and Ron Wood, and was unleashed in another retro-flavoured cover that sat very nicely alongside *Long Player*. Unfortunately all was not well in the Faces camp. Despite continuing the party unabated, cracks were starting to show within the band, and when the single *Reason to Believe*, backed by *Maggie May*, was released in October, its incredible level of success began a process of implosion that not only catapulted Rod to solo stardom but also signalled the beginning of the end for the Faces. *Reason to Believe*, Rod's cover of the Tim Hardin song, was the

Ronnie Wood (left) and Rod Stewart (right) in 1973.

'A set list? Set lists were for wimps. Wimps and professionals. Better to just get out there and communicate the set by shouting the old Faces' battle cry: "What number are we doing?"'

Taken from 'Rod: The Autobiography'

original A-side, but when the flip side, *Maggie May*, received airplay it stormed to the top of the charts in the UK and the US. It was a huge seller helped by some memorable appearances on the UK's chart television programme *Top of the Pops* with Rod and the Faces kicking footballs around with Faces supporter John Peel famously spoofing on mandolin. The incredible level of exposure the single brought bolstered the sales of Rod's solo album *Every Picture Tells a Story* and in a matter of weeks, he had No. 1s in the single and album charts on both sides of the Atlantic. Ironically, *Maggie May*'s huge success became a source of tension behind the scenes when the rest of the group found themselves miming on television under the banner of Rod Stewart and the Faces. The not-so-insignificant matter of royalties, in light of its massive sales, caused further unrest. For McLagan, Lane and Jones, who had been around the block several times before, and were household names in their own right, the discrepancy in earnings was a bitter pill to swallow. On the one hand, the single gave each participant more publicity than they could have dreamt of several months earlier, but it also opened up a divide, which inevitably lead to the end the band.

The success of *Every Picture Tells a Story* further established Rod as a solo force with an incredible surge of sales. The album is best remembered for the titular song, but contains several other gems that have stood the test of time remarkably well. The album opener is followed by *Seems Like a Long Time*, a track that oozes characteristic soul from Rod's husky vocals, and leads seamlessly into a more routine cover of *That's All Right*. The poetry of Bob Dylan's *Tomorrow Is a Long Time* follows, adding nuance and depth. Despite following in the wake of the timeless *Maggie May*, Rod's own *Mandolin Wind* delivers the real album highlight. The Faces then segue into *(I Know) I'm Losing You* – a song that further ignited the growing rift between Rod and the Faces, thanks to Rod's rather throwaway acknowledgment of the band's to the track. *Every Picture Tells a Story* ends on a high with *Reason to Believe*, which, when combined with the 1993 live version, has spent a total of forty-one weeks in the US Top 100, more than any other Rod Stewart song to date.

This hectic outpouring of material continued with the release of the Faces' third album *A Nod's As Good As a Wink to a Blind Horse*, which was produced by famed producer Glyn Johns and hit the charts in November 1971. The album provided the band with the smash single *Stay With Me* – a number penned by Rod and Ron Wood, which has remained one of the band's most enduring hits. In spite of the tensions within the band, *A Nod's As Good As a Wink…* ranks as one of the Faces' finest hours. *Miss Judy's Farm*, *Too Bad* and *That's All You Need* are all strong tracks by Rod and Ron, but the album is perhaps all the better for some memorable Ronnie Lane contributions. *You're So Rude*, which he co-wrote with McLagan and provides the vocals for, is a cheeky, upbeat number, whilst his *Love Lives Here* gives a warm insight into what made this much-loved man tick. *Last Orders Please* and the beautiful *Debris* also underline Ronnie's importance to the band, as he takes the helm whilst Rod supplies harmony-backing vocals. Lane's performance here is admirable, and he has since indicated that the lack of opportunity to sing lead vocals is a key reason for his departure from the Faces.

A Nod's As Good As a Wink… gave the Faces a welcome No. 2 in the UK charts and they capitalised on its success with another tour of the US, where they sold out every venue and appeared alongside Steve Marriott's Humble Pie before a crowd of two hundred thousand. A further remarkable feat was achieved when they sold out the Hollywood Bowl for a week and played to an audience of forty thousand in Dallas. In amongst all this on-the-road mania, Rod's fourth solo album came out. *Never a Dull Moment* produced two more hit singles for the star with *You Wear It Well* and a cover of Jimi Hendrix's *Angel*, which was backed by *What Made Milwaukee Famous*. On the face of it the choice to cover Jimi Hendrix's *Angel* may seem a strange one, but Rod gives an excellent performance,

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though it lacks some of the electrifying guitar showmanship of the original. *A Nod's As Good As a Wink…* continued to show just how strong a writing partnership Stewart and Wood team had become. Their *True Blue* is excellent album opener with some fine bass work by Ronnie Lane, this, alongside *Italian Girls* and *Lost Paraguayos* (a track which is somewhat hampered by its naïve lyrics) mark Wood's three contributions to the album. Rod's penchant for covering Bob Dylan resurfaces with *Mama You Been On My Mind*. The single *Angel* is next up, followed by *You Wear It Well*, a track written by Rod and Martin Quittenton that is an album highlight and leads nicely into another classic, *I'd Rather Go Blind*. This excellent record ends with a cover of Sam Cook's *Twistin' the Night Away*, and must certainly rank as one of Rod's finest early albums.

As Rod became increasingly distracted by his solo commitments, a further Faces single, *Cindy Incidentally* hit the No. 2 spot in the UK in 1973. Returning to the studio to start work on what would become the next Faces album, *Ooh La La*, the band soon encountered problems, as a disaffected Rod refused to even appear at the Olympic Studio where the band were recording, leaving them to work on material alone for two weeks. When the star did finally appear he was so unsatisfied with and frustrated by his efforts to lay down the vocals for the album's title track, that he eventually gave up altogether and left the lead to Ron Wood. By now, a huge rift had occurred within the band and Glyn Johns had to work tirelessly to pull an album together.

The band's difficulties in the studio were well documented, and Rod discussed the future direction of the Faces with *Sounds* magazine in 1973: **'Right now I don't feel either my albums or the Faces albums are as good as they could be. So the next album is the last I'm going to make on my own and next year we start making them together. Rod Stewart/Faces albums – that's what we're going to see.'**

Ooh La La was eventually released in March 1973. Running at little over half an hour, the album's real highlight is the all too brief *Flags and Banners*, sung by Ronnie Lane, which features Rod making a rare appearance on guitar. *My Fault* is powerfully delivered and *Borstal Boys* is a classic Faces riot. *If I'm On the Late Side*, *Glad and Sorry*, *Just Another Honky* and *Ooh La La* see out this truncated and filler-laden album. This was clearly not a band pulling together anymore

The Faces in 1974.
Left to right: Kenney Jones, Rod Stewart, Ronnie Wood, Ian McLagan and Tetsu Yamauchi.

and the inevitable split occurred when Ronnie Lane saw the writing on the wall and left. Rod Stewart was unimpressed with the album and declared so in no uncertain terms to several music papers, even going so far as to tell *Melody Maker* that the album was, **'A bloody mess. But I shouldn't say that, should I? Well, I should say it in a few weeks' time. Not now. I mean, the public ain't gonna like me saying it's a bloody mess. It was a disgrace. Maybe I'm too critical. But look, I don't like it… All that fucking about taking nine months to do an album like *Ooh La La* doesn't prove anything.'**

Frustrated by his role within the band and the lacklustre material they were producing, Ronnie Lane left the Faces in June 1973 – taking the heart out of the project too. The accomplished bass player Tetsu Yamauchi of Free replaced him, but the Faces would never be the same again. Despite releasing a further live album in 1974 (the disappointing and chaotic *Coast to Coast: Overture and Beginners*) the band was effectively finished.

Rod had now seen the way forward and devoted the vast majority of his time to his thriving solo career. *Pool Hall Richard* became the first post-Ronnie Lane release from the Faces, which reached the UK Top 10, but was eclipsed by the success of the Rod Stewart solo single *Oh No Not My Baby*. *Oh No Not My Baby* featured backing from Jones, Wood and McLagan, which confused the public no end and lead to the Faces arriving to gigs on their subsequent tour to find they were billed as Rod Stewart and the Faces. This proved to be the nail in the coffin for the Faces as a band, with

members publicly speaking out about the hurt they felt at having become Rod's backing band, and even seeing some of their material appearing on his solo albums.

By the time Rod released his fifth album, *Smiler*, in October 1974, Ronnie Wood had already produced his own LP pointedly entitled *I've Got My Own Album to Do*, although somewhat embarrassingly the resulting sales saw Rod's release hit No. 1 in the UK whilst Ron's failed to make a significant impact. As *Smiler* hit the stores, Rod and the Faces took off on a UK tour and their single *You Can Make Me Dance, Sing or Anything* once again gave them a hit. In early 1975, the Faces left for a tour of the US, and it was there that Rod met Swedish actress and former Bond girl, the beautiful Britt Ekland. They quickly entered a serious relationship, and suddenly Rod began travelling everywhere as a couple with Britt, a move that separated him further from the rest of the Faces. Britt introduced Rod to the highlife of shopping and socialising in Paris, Milan and New York. It was a far cry from playing on the bombsites of London as a child, and this new world of glitz, and all the resulting publicity, impressed Rod so much that he enthusiastically embraced the lifestyle with characteristic wholeheartedness. All the plans of getting into the studio upon the Faces' return to the UK were shelved when Rod announced he was staying in America with his new partner. By the end of 1975 Ron Wood, who had grown increasingly tired of the lack of Faces activity, had completed a second solo album and agreed to join the Rolling Stones on their forthcoming tour. This was a rousing success, but left Ron free to also join the Faces when they finally resumed touring in August 1975. This already muddled situation was further complicated when Rod revealed that the material for his next solo album *Atlantic Crossing* would involve a whole new approach to the live act. The Faces were not happy and made no secret of this, but when the tour ended in October 1975, it was Rod that made the official announcement to the music media that he was leaving the band. Within weeks Ronnie Wood officially joined the Stones to work on *Black and Blue*, and the Faces were no more. Despite rumours and sporadic one-off appearances, the Faces have never reunited with the classic line-up of Ronnie Lane, Ian McLagan, Kenney Jones, Ronnie Wood and Rod Stewart, and following Ronnie Lane's unfortunate death in 1997 they never will. Although the Faces are now pensioners, it doesn't seem to have slowed them down and the members are now back on good terms after so many years. Stewart, Wood and Jones in fact performed a short set together back in 2015, proving there may still be hope for future live performances.

For Rod Stewart, this break up of the Faces heralded a chapter in his life that built upon his already impressive solo career. He was now a full time solo artist – without distraction – entirely in control of his own destiny, and it was not an opportunity that he would waste. Within a short time he became the biggest-selling recording artist in the world, a rock 'n' roll maverick that, at the age of seventy-four, is still rocking to this day.

RAMONES

Making a Punk Masterpice

Any lovers (or detractors) of punk music would not fail to acknowledge the influence the Ramones have had on punk, rock and popular music in general. Way ahead of their time and in most cases, far better than their contemporaries, the Ramones really did pave the way for hard-hitting simple rock 'n' roll songs. A singularity of vision that is best evidenced on their explosive debut album.

The Ramones were formed in Forest Hill, a suburb in Queens, New York in 1974. The members shared a passion for rock 'n' roll, and a disdain for what they considered to be the bloated dinosaurs of seventies rock 'n' roll.

Despite Tommy and Johnny (then known as Thomas Erdelyi and John Cummings) playing in a garage band in high school together, it was only drummer Joey Ramone (Jeffrey Hyman) that had enjoyed any previous success musically, having appearing as the drummer of the glam punk band Sniper. Johnny Ramone has since recalled, **'I was an unemployed construction worker from Forest Hills, and I loved rock and roll. And I had this guy bugging me for the past two years to play in a band. I finally gave in.'** This 'guy' was Tommy, and the band was the Ramones. With Dee Dee Ramone (Doug Colvin) now on bass, the band's line-up was complete and it was then that the group's inspired name change occurred. Dee Dee was the driving force behind the idea, he had heard that Paul McCartney would sometimes go under the alias Paul Ramon, and loved the idea for the band. It brought cohesion to the outfit, and for the often-chaotic punk scene, was a surprisingly savvy marketing tactic.

Names and roles now defined, the band began to play at New York punk staple CBGB's. Johnny Ramone: **'The first couple of times we played at CBGB's, our set list was six or seven songs long. We started playing there every week, charging a dollar at the door. We'd get ten or fifteen people to show up. Our 15 September show at CBGB's got taped by a theatre group, that was eye-opening for us, and we watched that over and over… After that we were always taping, whenever we could, looking to figure out what we could improve on. We learned a lot from that… We realised we had to get uniformed. So we got the costume down better and refined it as we played more and practiced more.'**

This distinctive new look quickly became one of the most recognisable and most emulated around, and with the release of their debut album in 1976, the Ramones began to shape the blossoming punk scene with their distinctive sound and style. A key element of this was the Ramones' branding, part of which was their iconic logo, which was designed by their longtime friend Arturo Vega (who can be seen in our exclusive Ramones documentary featured at the end of this article) Vega has described his inspiration for the design: **'I saw them as the ultimate all-American band. To me, they reflected the American character in general – an almost childish innocent aggression… I thought, The Great Seal of the President of the United States would be perfect for the Ramones, with the eagle holding arrows – to symbolize strength and the aggression that would be used against whomever dares to attack us – and an olive branch, offered to those who want to be friendly. But we decided to change it a little bit. Instead of the olive branch, we had an apple tree branch, since the Ramones were American as apple pie. And since Johnny was such a baseball fanatic, we had the eagle hold a baseball bat instead of the arrows.'**

The story behind one of the most iconic album covers of all time.

The Ramones originally wanted an album cover inspired by the Beatles, and spent a whopping $2,000 (the album's recording cost was only $6,400) trying to achieve this. Unfortunately the band hated the results and decided on the far punkier route of simply using an existing band photograph.

They had recently been shot for *Punk* magazine by photographer Roberta Bayley: 'The frame before it and the frame after it aren't that great, but for that one moment everyone looked right – exactly like the Ramones. Then when I was changing film, Dee Dee stepped in dog shit.'

Sire Records were able to purchase this photo for $125 and the classic cover was born.

Easily one of the most commonly imitated album sleeves of all time, the original showed the band wearing ripped jeans, leaning against a brick wall, and featured a back cover designed by artist Arturo Vega, that presented the band's now iconic logo and a belt buckle with a bald eagle.

Looking closely at the cover image it is clear that Johnny Ramone is, in true Ramones style, slipping the audience the middle finger, which is slyly tucked in to his belt loop: 'I was really trying to sneak it in. I felt like I got one over on everybody. But I guess they just expected it from us.'

For the next two decades this logo would be seen across the globe as the group toured and recorded tirelessly, releasing an impressive fourteen studio albums and performing a whopping 2,263 live concerts. Their cultural impact is indisputable; in 2002 the group were inducted in to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and are a constant presence in 'Greatest Bands of All Time' features. The Ramones' instantly recognisable hits have been covered ad nauseam and the group are constantly cited as a musical inspiration to fellow rock artists, KISS, Metallica, Green Day, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Rancid and U2 to name a few. U2's Bono has even gone so far as to say that it was the Ramones that 'got us started as a band' – arguably a dubious honour.

Here we look at the album that unleashed this unique punk force of nature upon the listening public – the blistering debut album *Ramones*.

"There's nobody as good as the Ramones, never will be. I mean everybody's just emulated us and now everybody just kinda takes our sound as their foundations."

Joey Ramone

If every debut album was as good as this one the world would be drowning in great bands.

Unfortunately not everyone is blessed with the clarity of thinking that characterised the early days of the Ramones. Long before the band even stepped into the studio to record their 1976 debut simply titled *Ramones*, the band had developed and refined its trademark sound. That sound was firmly based on the Ramones' vision of simple, high-energy, explosive rock 'n' roll. Tracks featured a rapid up tempo beat with the limited number of thrashed chords repeated at top speed. Over this simple rhythmic backdrop Joey would lay his engaging vocals. Verses were often repeated and the choruses were sometimes little more than a chant. That's not to say the fans were less than ecstatic. The chanted intro 'Hey ho, let's go!' which heralds *Blitzkrieg Bop*, the album opener, was to become the war cry for the Ramones army. The music seems to come out of nowhere, hurtling towards the listener at great speed like an express train in the dark. At only twenty-nine minutes in length the album is gone almost as quickly, but the impact is devastating.

This devastating impact was intended the mirror the excitement and raw energy of a Ramones stage show, and in an attempt to recreate this; the Ramones recorded the songs in the order where they featured in the band's live set. Impressed by the impact of the recordings, this was a technique that the Ramones went on to use on their next two albums as well.

Rob Freeman was the sound engineer working on *Ramones* in 1976, and recalled the eventful recording sessions in *Recording Ramones*, published on his Titlewave Productions website: **'As I was setting up microphones around the band's equipment, I noticed the "double stack" amps (one head with two speaker cabinets) for the guitar and for the bass. These guys were going to be loud! This presented an acoustical challenge: how best to give each instrument and its corresponding microphones sufficient room to breathe while minimizing "leakage" (sound spillage) from one instrument into another instrument's microphones. That was the classic rock and roll recording battle.**

'Although I had previously seen the Ramones perform live at their native haunt, CBGB's, the sight of them trailing into Plaza Sound's control room in single file was arresting. They didn't look like other bands I'd worked with; instead, they each wore a uniform consisting of black shaggy hair, black leather jacket, white tee shirt, ripped-at-the-knees blue jeans,

Despite Sire's high hopes for it, 'Ramones' was not a commercial success, reaching only No. 111 on the Billboard album chart. The two singles issued from the album, 'Blitzkrieg Bop' and 'I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend', failed to chart.

and well-worn white sneakers. They didn't communicate like other bands either; in fact, at the beginning, they didn't say much at all. I recall an early attempt at bonding with Tommy as we discovered our common Hungarian ancestry. They couldn't – or perhaps wouldn't – communicate on any musical level whatsoever. The most basic of inquiries such as "What key is this in?" or "Can you play that up an octave?" were answered with indifferent shrugs and apathetic grunts. They had a roadie to tune their guitars if a down stroke-weary string slipped its tension and when it came time for Dee Dee to sing a chorus in unison with Joey, they referred to this as "harmony". I sensed I was in for an interesting ride.'

Despite the speed at which the album was recorded (one week) it was no slapdash affair. The Ramones themselves may not have been a polished unit, but experienced producer Craig Leon was on hand to mould the raw material in to an artful album: **'I'm glad it sounded raw at first listen, but it was calculated to be that way. We used the best equipment we possibly could. Every kind of mike we used on the Ramones, I later used at Abbey Road on the London Symphony Orchestra.**

> "To me, punk is about being an individual and going against the grain and standing up and saying, 'This is who I am'."
>
> Joey Ramone

'There was a lot of studio trickery. There are several songs where there is much more than one guitar. There is a triangle on *I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend*. We overdubbed a bomb sound on *Havana Affair*. It's a tom-tom drum tuned very low and held under a piano, with someone holding the sustain pedal down so that it would ring when something hit it.

'Capturing the energy of the live shows was quite important. But if you jump to the conclusion that the sound of the recording was just the sound of the band live, you would be mistaken – even though that's what I was trying to convey. The album is quite layered and structured and took full advantage of the studio technology of its time.'

It seems incredible then that this was all achieved on the minimal budget of $6,400, the Ramones were paying for the studio time out of their advance and therefore were keen not to waste a single moment. Their music never aspired to perfection, and they were convinced that the production should not either. Writing in his autobiography *Commando* Johnny Ramone recalled, **'We started recording the first album on 2 February 1976, and we mixed it on 19 February. I didn't understand why it took that**

The Ramones on the streeets on Amsterdam in July 1977.
Left to right: Dee Dee Ramone, Joey Ramone, Tommy Ramone and Johnny Ramone.

long, I was only used to playing live. I thought you'd just go in and play all the songs in one day, and then do all the vocals the next. We were rushing through it because I was conscious that whatever money we wanted was ours and that we just had to pay all this money back. So whenever the engineer would ask me how I felt about a take, I'd say, "Oh, that's the best I ever played it. I don't think I'll ever play it that well again." And we'd move on.

'In the studio, they stuck me in a little room to play by myself with headphones. I thought it was strange, but what did I know? When any questions came up, the other guys would listen to me, and I would ask Tommy. Tommy knew more about what we should do.'

Unfortunately for the Ramones, the artistry displayed on the album was not widely appreciated by the public and the album only reached No. 111 in the US charts, selling a paltry six thousand units in the first year. Thankfully, in contrast to the lacklustre public response, the critics were astounded. *Ramones* gained rave reviews across the board, in particular from Robert Christgau of *The Village Voice* who became a stalwart supporter of the band. He was more than excited by the album, gushing, **'I love this record – love it – even though I know these boys flirt with images of brutality (Nazi especially) in much the same way [the Rolling Stones'] *Midnight Rambler* flirts with rape. This makes me uneasy. But my theory has always been that good rock and roll should damn well make you uneasy…**

> "All punk is attitude. That's what makes it – the attitude."
>
> Joey Ramone

'For me, it blows everything else off the radio; it's clean the way the Dolls never were, sprightly the way the Velvets never were, and just plain listenable the way Black Sabbath never was. None of which is to suggest that it's as important as any of these, Black Sabbath included. Just perfect, a minor classic.'

The lyrical content that made reviewer Robert Christgau so uneasy was one of the hallmarks of the Ramones throughout their career. Something Tommy Ramone discussed in the excellent book by Everett True entitled *Hey Ho Let's Go – The Story of the Ramones*: **'Many of our lyrics are downright psychotic. That, in itself, will be something people find controversial. We weren't looking for controversy like the Sex Pistols, we had interesting songs. Malcolm McLaren was older than us and a troublemaker, we were mature enough not to cause problems. We always felt humour was a vital element of good rock music. It may have been a cartoon in a sense that it was sometimes a caricature, or light-hearted – but if it was, it was a very complex and multi-dimensional one. People are offended by humour when combined with music, they think it trivializes or makes fun of it. But nobody loved rock more than we did.'**

Favourable reviews of *Ramones* were also featured in such high profile publications as *The New York Times*, *NME*, *Rolling Stone* and *Time*. With *Time* magazine's Theunis Bates stating, 'It is the ultimate punk statement.' This newfound critical acclaim somewhat

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Guitarist Johnny Ramone and vocalist Joey Ramone, were the only original members to remain in the line-up until the band's split.

bemused Johnny Ramone at the time, as he has recalled in his autobiography, **'When I saw some of the reviews, I thought they were funny. Some people would see us as these cartoon rock-music characters, while others tried to intellectualize the record, like it was this big statement. We were really serious, trying to be good. But we weren't thinking of it was anything besides fun rock and roll; we weren't really trying to be anything but that. But as long as people were enjoying it, that was good.'**

The album's popularity has only increased over the years, as its impact on the punk scene and music itself has become more evident, and the record finally reached gold status thirty-eight years after its release. *Ramones* was all about atmosphere and attitude, an attitude that inspired countless other bands that followed. This influence was felt around the world in 1976, and particularly within the international punk scene. Bassist Tony James, of UK punk band Generation X recalled the impact of *Ramones* on the English market: **'When their album came out, all the English groups tripled speed overnight. Two-minute-long songs, very fast. Everybody went up three gears the day they got that first Ramones album. Punk rock – that rama-lama super fast stuff – is totally down to the Ramones. Bands were just playing in an MC5 groove until then.'**

The punk scene exploded in the UK in 1977, and has continued to dictate the musical status quo, with the genre's pop-punk successors dominating the charts through the nineties and early noughties. The Ramones laid the path for the short, punchy songs that charactize the genre, bursts of frenetic energy that are perfect for TV and radio. Many of the pop-punk bands of the noughties are enjoying a revival in popularity today in 2019, incontrovertible evidence of the Ramones' continuing legacy. Punk's place in the history of rock cannot be underestimated, and it is a history that would have looked very different were it not for a group of shaggy-haired misfits that the world came to love as the Ramones.

Studio engineer Rob Freeman summed it up perfectly when he mused, **'On the surface, the *Ramones* project was simply that of a fledgling band making its debut album. But from what I observed in the control room, there was surely something more going on. The band's manager, media mogul Danny Fields, spent his days fielding calls from Europe and elsewhere and answering questions about the band, the recording, and upcoming tour plans. Photographers streamed in and out and assembly-line phone interviews with band members were conducted throughout the days and late into the nights. I once overheard the band talking among themselves about how one day they would make records with legendary producer Phil Spector… and we know what happened when that fantasy met reality four years later. For me, *Ramones* was an exciting and challenging recording project. But for the Ramones, it was not so much about making their first record as it was about taking their first step toward world domination!'**

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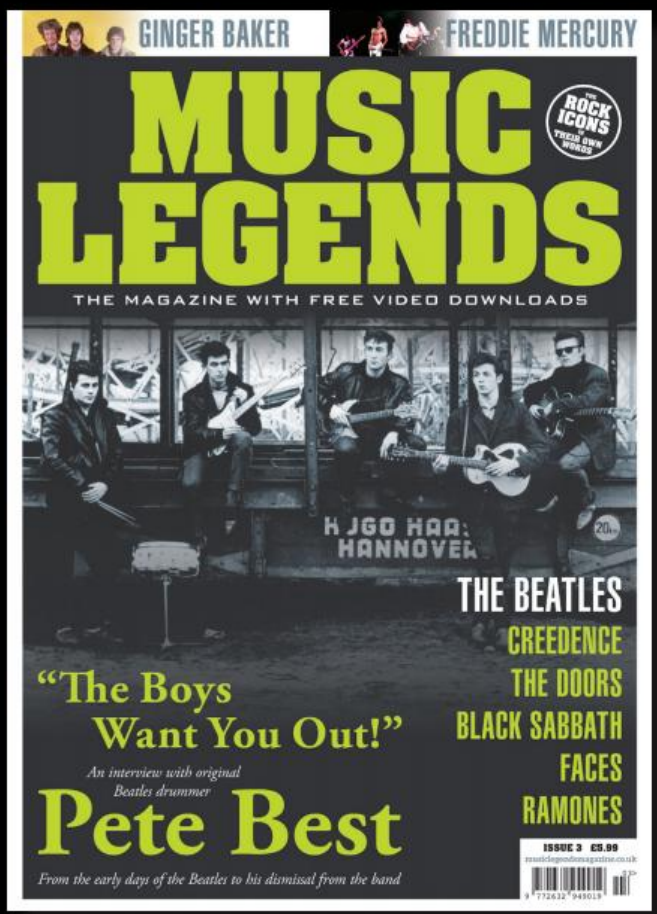

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